

# RACE TRAITOR

*Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity*



*winter 1993*

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Number 1

Winter 1993

EDITORIAL: ABOLISH THE WHITE RACE - BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY	1
TWO WHO SAID 'NO' TO WHITENESS: BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1962-1975	James W. Fraser 9
LYDIA MARIA CHILD AND THE EXAMPLE OF JOHN BROWN	Carolyn L. Karcher 21
THE AMERICAN INTIFADA	Noel Ignatiev 45
BRIDGES AND BOUNDARIES: BLACK-JEWISH RELATIONS	50
READING, 'RITING, AND RACE	John Garvey 73
CIVIL WAR REENACTMENTS AND OTHER MYTHS	Philip Rubio 88
THE WHITE QUESTION	David Roediger 104
MALCOLM X BEYOND LABELS	David Kurnick 108
LETTER FROM EUROPE	Louis Kushnick 114
CORRESPONDENCE	126
PLANS	128
"RACIAL LOYALTY" OR RACE TREASON	inside back cover

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cover: scene in Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict

published at PO Box 603, Cambridge, Mass. 02140. Single copy: individuals, \$5; institutions, \$10. 20% discount on orders of 5 or more.



## Editorial: Abolish the white race - by any means necessary

The white race is a historically constructed social formation - *historically* constructed because (like royalty) it is a product of some people's responses to historical circumstances; a *social* formation because it is a fact of society corresponding to no classification recognized by natural science.

The white race cuts across ethnic and class lines. It is not coextensive with that portion of the population of European descent, since many of those classified as "colored" can trace some of their ancestry to Europe, while African, Asian, or American Indian blood flows through the veins of many considered white. Nor does membership in the white race imply wealth, since there are plenty of poor whites, as well as some people of wealth and comfort who are not white.

The white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share, in certain respects, a status higher than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to the system that degrades them.

The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race. Until that task is accomplished, there can be no universal reform, and even partial reform will prove elusive, because white influence permeates every issue in U.S. society, whether domestic or foreign.

Advocating the abolition of the white race is distinct from what is called "anti-racism." The term "racism" has come to be applied to a variety of attitudes, some of which are mutually incompatible, and has been devalued to mean little more than a tendency to dislike some people for the color of their skin. Moreover, anti-racism admits the natural existence of "races" even while opposing social distinctions among them. The abolitionists maintain, on the contrary, that people were not favored socially because they were white; rather they were

## 2 - RACE TRAITOR

defined as "white" because they were favored. Race itself is a product of social discrimination; so long as the white race exists, all movements against racism are doomed to fail.

The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender or any other interests they hold. The defection of enough of its members to make it unreliable as a determinant of behavior will set off tremors that will lead to its collapse.

*Race Traitor* aims to serve as an intellectual center for those seeking to abolish the white race. It will encourage dissent from the conformity that maintains it and popularize examples of defection from its ranks, analyze the forces that hold it together and those which promise to tear it apart. Part of its task will be to promote debate among abolitionists. When possible, it will support practical measures, guided by the principle, *Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity*.

### Dissolve the club

The white race is a club, which enrolls certain people at birth, without their consent, and brings them up according to its rules. For the most part the members go through life accepting the benefits of membership, without thinking about the costs. When individuals question the rules, the officers are quick to remind them of all they owe to the club, and warn them of the dangers they will face if they leave it.

*Race Traitor* aims to dissolve the club, to break it apart, to explode it. Some people who sympathize with our aim have asked us how we intend to win over the majority of so-called whites to anti-racism. Others, usually less friendly, have asked if we plan to exterminate physically millions, perhaps hundreds of millions of people. Neither of these plans is what we have in mind. The weak point of the club is its need for unanimity. Just as the South, on launching the Civil War, declared that it needed its entire territory and would have it, the white race must have the support of all those it has designated as its constituency, or it ceases to



exist.

Elsewhere in this number, readers will find an account of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry and some of the events it set in motion. Before the Civil War, the leading spokesmen for the slaveholders acknowledged that the majority of white northerners, swayed above all by the presence of the fugitive slave, considered slavery unjust. The Southerners also understood that the opposition was ineffective; however much the white people of the north disapproved of the slave system, the majority went along with it rather than risk the ordinary comforts of their lives, meager as they were in many cases.

When John Brown attacked Harpers Ferry, Southern pro-slavery leaders reacted with fury: they imposed a boycott on northern manufactures, demanded new concessions from the government in Washington, and began to prepare for war. When they sought to portray John Brown as a representative of northern opinion, Southern leaders were wrong; he represented only a small and isolated minority. But they were also right, for he expressed the hopes that still persisted, dimly perceived, in the northern population despite decades of cringing before the slaveholders. Virginia did not fear John Brown and his small band of followers, but his soul that would go marching on, though his body lay a-mould'rin' in the grave.

When the South, in retaliation for Harpers Ferry, sought further to bully northern opinion, it did so not out of paranoia but out of the realistic assessment that only a renewal of the national pro-slavery vows could save a system whose proud facade concealed a fragile foundation. By the arrogance of their demands, the Southern leaders compelled the people of the north to resist. Not ideas but events were in command. Each step led inexorably to the next: Southern land-greed, Lincoln's victory, secession, war, blacks as laborers, soldiers, citizens, voters. And so the war that began with not one person in a hundred foreseeing the end of slavery was transformed within two years into an anti-slavery war.

It is our faith - and with those who do not share it we shall not argue - that the majority of so-called whites in this

#### 4 - RACE TRAITOR

country are neither deeply nor consciously committed to white supremacy; like most human beings in most times and places, they would do the right thing if it were convenient. As did their counterparts before the Civil War, most go along with a system that disturbs them, because the consequences of challenging it are terrifying. They close their eyes to what is happening around them, because it is easier not to know.

At rare moments their nervous peace is shattered, their certainty is shaken, and they are compelled to question the common sense by which they normally live. One such moment was in the days immediately following the Rodney King verdict, when a majority of white Americans were willing to admit to polltakers that black people had good reasons to rebel, and some joined them. Ordinarily the moments are brief, as the guns and reform programs (both of which are aimed at whites as well as blacks - the guns as a warning and the reform programs as a salve to their consciences) are moved up to restore order and, more important, the confidence that matters are in good hands and they can go back to sleep.

Recently, one of our editors, unfamiliar with New York City traffic laws, made an illegal right turn there on a red light. He was stopped by two cops in a patrol car. After examining his licence, they released him with a courteous admonition. Had he been black, they probably would have ticketed him, and might even have taken him down to the station. A lot of history was embodied in that small exchange: the cops treated the miscreant leniently at least in part because they assumed, looking at him, that he was white and therefore loyal. Their courtesy was a habit meant both to reward good conduct and induce future cooperation.

Had the driver cursed them, or displayed a bumper sticker that said, "Avenge Rodney King," the cops might have reacted differently. We admit that neither gesture on the part of a single individual would in all likelihood be of much consequence. But if enough of those who looked white broke the rules of the club to make the cops doubt their ability to recognize a white person merely by looking at him or her,



how would it affect the cops' behavior? And if the police, the courts, and the authorities in general were to start spreading around indiscriminately the treatment they normally reserve for people of color, how would the rest of the so-called whites react?

How many dissident so-called whites would it take to unsettle the nerves of the white executive board? It is impossible to know. One John Brown - against a background of slave resistance - was enough for Virginia. Yet it was not the abolitionists, not even the transcendent John Brown, who brought about the mass shifts in consciousness of the Civil War period. At most, their heroic deeds were part of a chain of events that involved mutual actions and reactions on a scale beyond anything they could have anticipated - until a war that began with both sides fighting for slavery (the South to take it out of the Union, the north to keep it in) ended with a great army marching through the land singing, "As He died to make men holy, let us fight to make men free."

The moments when the routine assumptions of race break down are the seismic promise that somewhere in the tectonic flow a new fault is building up pressure, a new Harpers Ferry is being prepared. Its nature and timing cannot be predicted, but of its coming we have no doubt. When it comes, it will set off a series of tremors that will lead to the disintegration of the white race. We want to be ready, walking in Jerusalem just like John.

### **What kind of journal is this?**

*Race Traitor* exists, not to make converts, but to reach out to those who are dissatisfied with the terms of membership in the white club. Its primary intended audience will be those people commonly called whites who, in one way or another, understand whiteness to be a problem that perpetuates injustice and prevents even the well-disposed among them from joining unequivocally in the struggle for human freedom. By engaging these dissidents in a journey of discovery into whiteness and its discontents, we hope to take

## 6 - RACE TRAITOR

part, together with others, in the process of defining a new human community.

Really, there are two questions - who are our readers and who are our writers? We imagine that both will be quite diverse. We expect to be read by educators, by clergy, by scholars, by parents, by teenagers - in short, by many people for whom the willingness to question their membership in the white club might be the only thing they hold in common. We anticipate that if we are successful, those individuals will come to have a great deal more in common.

About our writers: several months ago, we sent out a letter and brochure, mostly to people we knew, either personally or by reputation, and asked them to consider submitting articles for the premier issue of *Race Traitor*. We were delighted at the response and we hope that you share our enthusiasm. In addition to the articles included here, we have already received some that we will be publishing in our next issue.

At the time of the initial request, we provided some clues about the type of articles we hoped to receive but made it clear that we were willing to consider all submissions. We remain willing to do so and encourage all our readers to submit material.

You may wonder what kind of articles we want. We want to chronicle and analyze the making, re-making and un-making of whiteness. We wish neither to minimize the complicity of even the most downtrodden of whites with the system of white supremacy nor to exaggerate the significance of momentary departures from white rules. We want to get it right. With this, our first issue, we think we have barely made a beginning. Here are some topics we would like to have investigated and written about:

**Movies** - reviews of films such as *The Commitments*, *Q & A*, the newly released *Zebrahead*, and *Malcolm X*;

**Sports** - articles examining the ways in which the participation and interest in organized sports affects notions of



excellence and ability;

**Schools** - a look at the California social studies text book controversy and the issue of multi-culturalism.

**Political Representation** - an article on the recent redistricting of the New York City Council which drew race lines all across the city in order to promote the goal of group representativeness among local legislators;

**Unions** - an article on the contrast between the public posture of most of the trade unions, which stresses their support for civil rights and equality, and their everyday practices which continue to provide preferential treatment for whites, usually men;

**Young People** - articles not only about, but by, young people - about their schools, their neighborhoods, their friends, their conflicts (and their alliances) with their parents;

**Political Philosophy** - an article exploring the issue of responsibility. Who is responsible for things going on the way they do? How important is intent?

**Literature** - both original fiction and poetry and interpretive essays, especially on American writers;

**Graphics** - photographs and art work. To do so, we need artistic and technical assistance from our readers.

**Debate** - criticism and discussion through letters.

**Music** - of course.

These are only ideas. We are sure that our readers will have many more of their own - stories to tell, questions to ask. Please do not be shy. If you are not sure, write us and tell us about your ideas and we will respond.

We should say that there are some articles we are not interested in publishing. Since we are not seeking converts, we probably will not publish articles which lecture various organizations about their racial opportunism. Also, we

## 8 - RACE TRAITOR

probably will not publish articles promoting inter-racial harmony, because that approach too often leaves intact differential treatment of whites and blacks and provides subtle confirmation of the idea that different races exist independently of social distinctions.

Finally, a note about tone and style: we want well-written articles, and are willing to work with contributors on revisions we think necessary. We want the journal to be accessible to a wide audience. We welcome scholarly articles, but we may ask the authors to include more background explanation than they would for a professional journal.

In the original film version of *Robin Hood* (starring Errol Flynn), the Sheriff of Nottingham says to Robin, "You speak treason." Robin replies, "Fluently." We hope to do the same.



# Two who said 'No' to whiteness: Boston public schools, 1962-1975

James W. Fraser

The desegregation of the Boston Public Schools in the 1970s has been described in great detail by many historians representing many different perspectives. One perspective which has been notably absent from the description of the events of those years is the degree to which a destructive "loyalty to whiteness" in many of the city's neighborhoods created a level of violence and divisiveness not previously seen in twentieth century Boston.

In his book, *Common Ground*, J. Anthony Lukas describes a variety of white people who were active in the desegregation process in Boston. Two of the three families which receive major attention in the book, the McGoff's of Charlestown and the Diver's of the South End are white, as are all four of those receiving vignette chapters: School Committee Member, Louise Day Hicks, Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, and Mayor Kevin White.<sup>1</sup> Among the many complaints about the book, few have argued that it paid too little attention to whites.

Historian Jon Hillson has written of *Common Ground*:

It negates two things. First, the rich and powerful record of grassroots Black community activism that marked the fight for school desegregation starting in the 1950s and continuing through the climactic years after the Garrity order. And secondly, Lukas makes no mention whatso-

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## 10 - RACE TRAITOR

ever of the whites, in Charlestown and South Boston among other places, who complied with and supported the court order despite the threat of terror and violence by anti-busing gangs, of which Lukas' Alice McGoff was an enthusiastic leader.<sup>2</sup>

I agree with Hillson. Both the story of African-American leadership--not merely passive acceptance--in the struggle for quality education and school desegregation in Boston and the story of whites who rejected the racism of the McGoff's and the Hicks' and who struggled for better schools and an end to violence and racism in their communities is essential for a full understanding of the story of Boston during these years.

By focusing so clearly on two groups of whites--upper class liberals and conservative "leaders" in working-class communities, like the McGoff's of Charlestown--Lukas leaves a strong impression with his readers that all working class whites militantly opposed the desegregation process and shared in the racism of some of their leaders. Indeed by portraying the McGoff's so sympathetically, Lukas seems to give legitimacy to the racism which they came to symbolize. The theme seems to be, "life is rough for white working-class families,"--and indeed it is--but somehow in Lukas' version, this reality justifies the racism which the McGoff's and others came to embrace. This is a very dangerous view for a journalist to offer or for historians to accept. It assumes that it is natural for whites to rally around themes of race loyalty, especially in hard times, rather than reaching out to build coalitions across the barriers of race which exist in America.

Ian Menzies, a thoughtful Boston *Globe* correspondent, has written of *Common Ground*.

This is now a cult book. It is the gospel according to Lukas. The author is seen by some as the sociologist's new guru. But is this real history, or is it one view of a traumatic era in Boston history as seen through the eyes of an upper middle class writer striving to understand lower-class, inner-city values? It is a terrific book to



read, but is it more good theater than good social analysis, and does it beg many questions?<sup>3</sup>

Of course all history is incomplete. But it is the historian's duty to select carefully and honestly, to make sure that the incompleteness of the history does not lead to serious distortion. In order for the history of desegregation to be accurate, some other people need to be included. I want to add some other characters to the story. I have selected two for this paper. The people I want to talk about are not judges or lawyers, or princes of the church. They are a teacher, and a mother; regular people. They are also whites who said no to racism; whites who by their action, by their courage, give the lie to the impression that everyone in a community like Charlestown, South Boston, or East Boston all agreed with or went along with the demagogues who brought Boston to such sad times in the 1970s. It is essential that historians remember that the McGoff family did not represent the only alternative available in Boston's white communities. There were people holding up other options, including the two described here.

### **Evelyn Morash (mother)**

When I asked Evelyn Morash how she first came to be involved in the process of desegregating the Boston schools, she responded, "Well, it all started with warm milk."<sup>4</sup> It seemed that there was no refrigeration at the Patrick Kennedy School in East Boston where some of her children were enrolled in the mid-1960s. The milk being delivered for the children would arrive cold in the morning, but by lunch time it had gotten warm. Since she was active in the development of libraries for the schools of the East Boston district, as well as the Kennedy School's Home and School Association, a Boston parent organization wholly controlled by the school department, she began to bring up the issue of the warm milk at some of the meetings she attended. It seemed a simple enough concern, but the issue quickly led Morash, and a

## 12 - RACE TRAITOR

group of other parents, to begin to ask more questions about the decaying buildings in which their children attended school throughout the white working-class neighborhood of East Boston.

At this point in the process, these parents had no larger agenda for changing the Boston public schools, certainly not one of integrating the schools throughout the city. But as one thing led to another, the pattern of institutional resistance to any kind of change became clearer. Along the way, this group of concerned parents came face to face with the reality that for too many in their own communities, the good of even their own children took second place to their determination to maintain their status as whites who saw themselves as superior to people of color.

The result of the concern over warm milk and other problems with the school buildings throughout East Boston led Morash to begin talking to parents at other schools in the neighborhood. This is when the trouble began. In what seemed like a logical step, Morash invited representatives from each Home and School Association in East Boston together to discuss problems with the school buildings. The group named itself the Association of East Boston Home and School Associations, and began to study problems in all school buildings in the neighborhood. Within a week of their formation, the group was informed by the school department that they had no right to meet; that the term Home and School Association was "owned" by the school department, and that each association was to report directly to the school department, and that Morash had no right to call a meeting of different associations.

Many parents might have been cowed by this expression of official authority. But East Boston mothers had been fighting with the city over many different issues for decades and they had no intention of giving in at this point. They simply renamed their organization the East Boston Parents and Teachers Who Care and declared their independence of the school department. They also continued their campaign for better school buildings and for a voice in the design of

the new building which was to replace the aging Barnes Middle School.

But at this point, a critical change happened. Morash, as a leader of Parents and Teachers Who Care, was invited by some African-American mothers to a meeting at the Lena Park Community Center in Roxbury to discuss ways to end the role of patronage in the hiring of principals throughout the city. As parents from throughout the city gathered together, some common concerns began to emerge, especially the concerns about the quality of educational leadership in the schools. Clearly the school department was using divide-and-conquer tactics to justify poor schools in all of the city's neighborhoods. From their perspective, such citywide meetings were very dangerous.

When Morash returned to Parents and Teachers Who Care, she found the meeting packed with new recruits brought by another member of the group--Elvira ("Pixie") Palladino. Palladino then introduced a motion that no member of the organization had a right to represent the group at meetings outside of East Boston, and specifically no right to meet with Black parents. The motion passed, and in Morash's words, "that was the end of Parents and Teachers Who Care." Ironically, at exactly the same moment when Morash and other parents concerned simply with gaining a good education for their children were finding the opportunity to build a citywide coalition to work together, to identify a real common ground between the parents in white communities like East Boston and the communities of color in Roxbury and North Dorchester, others like Palladino were deciding that the common ground was not the important ground; that it was more important for the communities of Boston to remain divided by race than to work together. It may have been the end of one organization, but it was not the end of the clashes between Morash and Palladino.

As the African-American community in Boston continued its fight for quality, desegregated education in the city's schools--a fight in which the African-American community, far from being passive in the ways described by Lukas, was the



## 14 - RACE TRAITOR

most active element--Morash and Palladino met again. As part of the provisions of the state's Racial Imbalance Act, Boston was mandated to design a plan by the Spring of 1972 which would guarantee the racial balance of all Boston's schools by September, 1973. At its meeting of January 25, 1972, the Boston School Committee created a Citizens Advisory Committee on school district lines to find the means of achieving compliance with the law. Among the Superintendent's nominees was Evelyn Morash of East Boston, described as "extremely active in school and community affairs in East Boston for many years. She is one of the guiding lights of the East Boston Parents and Teachers Who Care, has worked long and diligently on the plans for the new Barnes Middle School, and worked closely with the East Boston APAC." But she was not destined to serve. As the committee was considering the Superintendent's nominees, the minutes show that they recognized Mrs. Elvira Palladino, President of the John Cheverus District [Home and School Association] in East Boston, who said:

As for the appointment of Mrs. Morash from East Boston to the advisory Council, State Board of Education, the only thing I have to say for her is this....She is honor bound to redistrict. The important word here is not 'redistricting' but 'freedom of choice.' I will never relinquish my freedom of choice to this or any other group such as this, and I will fight for my freedom of choice with any means available to me, be they devious or otherwise."<sup>5</sup>

The school committee then voted (3 in favor, 2 not voting) to substitute Palladino's name for Morash's on the committee. As the lawyers for the Center for Law and Education noted in one of the briefs which ultimately led to the 1974 federal court order, "Mrs. Palladino, who had just denounced redistricting, became a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee. Mrs. Morash, who had been described by Mrs. Palladino as 'honor-bound to redistrict,' was not appointed."

It became one of the clearest examples on record of the deliberate moves by the Boston School Committee to keep the schools of the system segregated.<sup>6</sup>

In subsequent years, Morash was appointed to the State Board of Education and became an increasingly articulate advocate of a desegregated school system, as well as of a system in which parents could play a major role in the design and control of the facilities in which their children attended school. During the most difficult years of desegregation in the 1970s her house was vandalized, her children received bomb-threats, and her own life was threatened at more than one community meeting. After one particularly frightening encounter, however, her son reassured her. "They aren't going to kill you, Mom. If they killed you they would have to name the new school for you, and they are never going to allow that."

Morash's story is not an isolated instance. She was supported by many others in East Boston. In other neighborhoods which were mostly white working-class, such as Hyde Park, Roslindale, Jamaica Plain, other mothers emerged with the same grit and determination to resist the demagogues like Palladino, John Kerrigan and Louise Day Hicks. Their story, their courage and determination, gives the lie to the belief that all the residents of those communities accepted the racism of the most noted leaders. It also removes the excuse of any who engaged in the racism and violence that they didn't know better, for in their midst they had other leaders offering alternative options in ways they could not fail to note.

### **Mary Ellen Smith (teacher)**

Mary Ellen Smith graduated with a teaching credential from Boston College in 1965. Not long after that, she became an elementary school teacher at the Gibson School in Dorchester, one of the oldest and most decrepit school buildings in the city, serving an almost totally African-American student body. This was the school in which Jonathan Kozol taught in the 1964-65 school year and which

## 16 - RACE TRAITOR

he subsequently immortalized in his *Death At An Early Age*.<sup>7</sup> Smith's departure from Gibson would be every bit as dramatic as Kozol's. In 1968 Smith and five other women teachers were fired for "conduct unbecoming a teacher" after they left their empty classrooms and walked to a neighboring community center to teach the children, who had been taken out of the school by their parents to protest the decaying building and the mind-numbing programs.

Smith and the other teachers argued that, "the school was where the kids were," but the School Committee fired them, and the courts supported the committee. Reflecting on the incident two decades later, Smith said:

In hindsight, I think there were two real reasons why we were fired during such a fluid and intense situation. First the School Committee was paranoid about race issues, and second, they were embarrassed to be caught in a deplorable situation. The system simply pulled the wagons around itself.<sup>8</sup>

After a couple of years working at a neighborhood social service center and helping with a major study of Boston's school drop-outs, Smith returned to the fray of Boston School politics as the first staff Director of the Citywide Educational Coalition. CWEC as it came to be known, was organized in the spring of 1972 to help provide parent and community input to the selection of a new superintendent to replace ten-year veteran William Ohrenberger, but the organization was quickly drawn into the desegregation battles. Under Smith's leadership, CWEC cultivated a diverse board and staff--black, white and Hispanic, some of whom supported the court order and some of whom did not, but all of whom were committed to support for parents and for keeping children in school. With the coming of the court order, CWEC, along with Freedom House in Roxbury, became the places to turn for accurate information about what was going on in the schools. At the same time, through its network of parent organizers, CWEC became the best center for controlling rumors and for



providing the city government with an early warning system for trouble.

In a recent interview, Mary Ellen insisted to me that the real heroes of the story in the white neighborhoods were the parents and children who simply went about their business during those difficult early years of desegregation, 1974-76. Their courage was all the greater, she insisted, "because they didn't particularly love the court order. They simply wanted to obey the law, and they needed to have their children in school." But given all of the ambivalence of many of these parents and students about the court order, they continued to attend school. . . continued to attend although rocks were thrown at their buses, and they risked danger of being beaten up for attending. Two examples represent many stories:

--one mother gave her young son two very clear instructions in the morning. . . 1) go to school today, and 2) don't bring any homework home, I don't want your friends, or more important, your father, to know that you were there.

--one youth regularly attended school, knowing that being seen at the bus stop in the morning meant being beaten up by the teen gangs who received their encouragement and direction from the South Boston marshals.

And Mary Ellen sighed, "they didn't even like the court order, they just wanted to get on with their lives."<sup>9</sup>

For many of these parents, however, the tactics of the most militant opponents of the court order often backfired. They resented the fear and intimidation which their own children experienced simply for attending school. They were appalled to see rocks thrown at school buses filled with five- and six- and seven-year-old children, appalled whether the children were black or white; whether or not they had originally supported the decision to deploy the fleet of buses. Again and again, the refrain was heard throughout the city's white neighborhoods, "and I used to think that they were my friends."

## 18 - RACE TRAITOR

In time, although it was far too long a time, the most racist and virulent of the anti-busing leaders did discredit themselves. They were not able to deliver on their promise of "Never." Their tactics, the rock throwing, the use of KKK slogans, appalled many. Beginning with the 1977 election of Boston's first twentieth-century African-American school committee member, John O'Bryant, Bostonians began to elect school committee members who, if not as liberal as O'Bryant, still did not accept the tactics of the Pixie Paladino's and Louise Day Hicks' who had led the system so close to the edge of a race war.

In the last pages of *Common Ground*, Lukas portrays Colin Diver, the white liberal lawyer looking back over the years of the most intense struggles surrounding school desegregation. In thoughts which I believe represent Lukas's own summary of the situation, he speaks of Diver:

Colin was particularly troubled by the class dimensions of this situation. Years before, in the wake of King's assassination, he and Joan [Diver] had addressed their professional careers and personal lives to the racial crisis, in particular to the Kerner Commission's solemn warning that we were becoming two societies, one white and one black. As the decade wore on, Colin came to perceive the "American dilemma" less in purely racial and legal terms, more in class and economic terms.<sup>10</sup>

The examples presented in this essay do not lead to the same conclusion as Colin Diver's. Certainly the problems of the Boston schools cannot be seen "in purely racial and legal terms." The poverty of white neighborhoods like Morash's East Boston or Smith's Hyde Park was certainly part of the problem. But the contrary conclusion is equally wrong. If the thesis of *Common Ground* is accepted, that the supposed common ground of class is more important than the issue of race in understanding and ultimately solving the seemingly intractable urban problems of the twentieth century, including

the problems of the schools, then the history of desegregation will have been distorted and public policies for the future will be designed badly. There is a real danger, as Ruth Batson, a long time activist in Boston's black community fears, that "*Common Ground* will forever distort the history of desegregation in Boston."<sup>11</sup>

If the school department officials had not been confident that they could use issues of race, could not appeal to a "loyalty to whiteness," to make sure that parents from Roxbury and parents from East Boston did not unite to fight the political patronage and the poor school facilities which were hurting the education of children in all neighborhoods, then there would have been a more positive response to the problems in the schools a decade earlier, and without the intervention of the federal court. If the Pixie Palladinos and John Kerrigans and Louise Day Hicks had not decided that they could build their political careers by fanning the flames of racism and fear, then the Evelyn Morash's and Mary Ellen Smith's, along with parents and teachers in Boston's communities of color, would have been able to make common cause with each other and with many others to improve the quality of education in their children's schools.

But these things did not happen. And they did not happen because of the long American tradition of racism. Because of that racism, because political leaders saw the opportunity to elevate "loyalty to whiteness," above any common struggles, the decade of the 1970s was one of the most painful in Boston's long history. Only by facing clearly the racism of those days can any accurate history be written or any new common ground be achieved. To say that race and racism was not the issue is to miss the heart of the struggle over Boston's schools and to lay a weak foundation for future change. It is only as the whole tragic story is addressed head on, when more people find the courage to say no to racism, that the people of the nation's cities will be able to truly find a meaningful common ground.



## 20 - RACE TRAITOR

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Jon Hillson, "In Defense of Busing, Black Equality and School Desegregation," unpublished paper, pp. 6-8.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Menzies, "Commentary," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, March 23, 1986, p. A24.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Evelyn Morash, East Boston, October, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Boston School Committee, "Minutes of January 25, 1972," P. Ex. 748, pp. 16-19.

<sup>6</sup> Eric E. Van Loon, Attorney, Center for Law and Education, to Evelyn Morash, November 5, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *Death At An Early Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> "From 'Gibson Girl' to Board Chair: An interview with Mary Ellen Smith," *The Federation Paper* [Massachusetts Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO], April, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mary Ellen Smith, Boston, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Lukas, p. 650.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Batson, cited in Menzies.

# Lydia Maria Child and the example of John Brown

Carolyn L. Karcher

The fact is, I want to shoot the accursed institution from all quarters of the globe. I think, from this time till I die, I shall stop firing only long enough to load my guns.<sup>1</sup>

Conveying the militant mood and incessant activism triggered in the veteran abolitionist Lydia Maria Child by John Brown's October 1859 raid on the Federal Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, this metaphorical declaration of war encapsulates her response to the meteoric event that so many Americans recognized as heralding the final onslaught against slavery. Its context--a warm letter to Maria Weston Chapman, with whom Child was once again working closely after a sixteen-year rupture--also betokens her reintegration into an antislavery army that was at last confronting the slave power in a "solid phalanx," as she had advocated during the 1856 Kansas crisis.<sup>2</sup> "I have never done so much anti-slavery work in any year of my life," Child would write, looking back on the turbulent interval between the Harper's Ferry outbreak and the 1860 election.<sup>3</sup> Besides circulating petitions, fundraising, attending antislavery meetings, and writing a record number of political letters, she produced four major tracts that year, which she personally mailed by the hundred to key opinion-makers; and she edited and helped publish and distribute a slave narrative now ranked as an African American

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## 22 - RACE TRAITOR

literary classic: Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Paradoxically, however, Child did not intend to set off a civil war with the barrage of ammunition she fired against the "accursed institution." Rather, she still hoped to avert war by convincing Southerners as well as Northerners that the best interests of all classes lay in abolishing slavery peacefully before it was too late. The tension between the militant stance she urged against slavery and the pacifist ideals she upheld would pervade her writings of the "John Brown Year" and indeed of the entire civil war era.

"ATTEMPTED INSURRECTION IN HARPER'S FERRY." The headlines that flashed across the country on October 17, 1859, jolting abolitionists, proslavery advocates, and compromisers out of a three-year stasis, likewise roused Child from the grief into which her successive bereavements had plunged her following the 1856 election--the peak of her activism for a Free Kansas. A few months earlier, Child had participated in the annual New England Anti-Slavery Convention for the first time in many years. The speeches, which she had found "edifying," had left her feeling more in harmony with her former comrades than she had since the 1830s.<sup>4</sup>

Savoring the pleasure of belonging to an antislavery community again, Child did not notice the tall, gaunt man with a streaming, iron-gray beard--soon to grip the nation's attention at Harper's Ferry--who stalked out of the Convention fuming, "Talk! talk! talk!--that will never set the slave free. What is needed is action--action."<sup>5</sup> Nor did she know that John Brown was then collecting money for his secret mission from her nephew-in-law, George Luther Stearns, and five other backers, including her friends Gerrit Smith, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Theodore Parker.<sup>6</sup> Only after the fateful irruption would Child recall that her husband David had actually met this fierce old guerrilla fighter, fresh from combat in Kansas, while Brown was enlisting the sponsorship of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee in 1857.<sup>7</sup> "I honor



those who conscientiously fight for justice, truth, or freedom; but I revere those who will *die* to advance great principles, though they will not *kill*," Child had written of the men Brown was leading in the struggle for a Free Kansas.<sup>8</sup> Brown would win her honor and reverence on the first two counts, but she would remain unable to embrace him wholeheartedly on the third count.

The capture of Harper's Ferry took even Brown's backers by surprise, for he had never fully divulged the details of his plan. He had merely intimated that it would involve swooping down on a plantation community in Virginia, liberating a large number of slaves, and organizing them into guerrilla bands that would operate out of fastnesses in the mountains and make periodic forays into slave territory for recruits and supplies. He had settled on Harper's Ferry--a choice his men had vehemently opposed when he had revealed it to them at the eleventh hour--primarily because an attack on a Federal stronghold would maximize the shock value of such a strike against slavery. "[I]f we lose our lives it will perhaps do more for the cause than our lives could be worth in any other way," Brown had argued, as if already anticipating the martyrdom through which he would transform failure into success.<sup>9</sup>

Brown and eighteen of his twenty-one followers stole into Harper's Ferry by night on October 16, easily overpowered the watchman guarding the arsenal, and took over the town. Brown then sent a few of his lieutenants to spread the word among the slaves and seize hostages from among the leading slaveholders. With an eye to historical symbolism and "moral effect," he chose a grandnephew of George Washington as his chief hostage and forced him to hand over Washington's prized sword to one of the five African Americans in the small liberation army, Osborne Anderson.<sup>10</sup> Aiming to trade the hostages for a safe conduct out of Harper's Ferry, and at the same time to drive home an antislavery lesson by treating them humanely, Brown lingered in the town until the next morning.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, to "allay the fears of those who believed" he had come "to burn and kill," he allowed a train

## 24 - RACE TRAITOR

he had stopped at the station to proceed to its destination (and of course raise the alarm)--another gesture of misplaced humanitarianism. "I could easily have saved myself . . . had I exercised my own better judgment rather than yielded to my feelings," he later admitted.<sup>12</sup> Apparently he had never quite decided between two irreconcilable conceptions of the raid: first as a spectacular hit-and-run operation aimed at recruiting slaves into his guerrilla force; second as a heroic suicide mission aimed at inspiring a national crusade to destroy slavery once and for all. Whatever Brown's intent, the latter conception ultimately prevailed. The very qualms that doomed him as a revolutionary canonized him as a martyr. Therein lay the secret of the profound influence he would exert on Child.

By noon on October 17th, Brown's fatal errors had caught up with him. Virginia and Maryland militia surrounded his band, and several of his men had been killed or disabled. The following morning, Federal marines under Colonel Robert E. Lee battered down the door of the engine house into which Brown had retreated with his prisoners. The victors found Brown's son Oliver dead, another son Watson dying, and his lieutenant Aaron Stevens critically injured--both of the latter from wounds they had received under a flag of truce. One of Lee's officers lunged at Brown with a sword after he was "down" and had agreed to surrender, stabbing him and attempting to split open his skull.<sup>13</sup> None of the prisoners had suffered any harm, though several townsmen and one marine had been killed in the siege. In all, ten of Brown's men fell at Harper's Ferry, four were captured, two who fled the scene were subsequently apprehended, and five succeeded in escaping--among them Osborne Anderson, who would publish the only eyewitness account of the raid by an African American participant; and Francis Jackson Merriam, whose grandfather and mother were good friends of Child's and prominent members of Garrison's circle.<sup>14</sup>

Albeit militarily defeated, Brown wrested the laurels from his captors in the widely publicized interview he gave the day

after the debacle. Speaking from his blood-stained pallet on the floor of the armory, Brown turned the interrogation into one of the most potent antislavery sermons the nation had ever heard. "I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of colored people, oppressed by the slave system, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful," he proclaimed. When asked how he justified his acts, he invoked the Golden Rule: "I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them: that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit." He specifically denied that he had intended to incite "a general rising of the slaves"--a denial he reiterated at his trial. Instead he had "expected to gather them up from time to time, and set them free." He went on to admonish the people of the South against the illusion that they could dispose of the "negro question" by disposing of him. "[T]his question . . . must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it," he warned.<sup>15</sup>

While considering the "[b]rave and generous" old man "sadly mistaken in his mode of operation," Child greeted Brown's incursion as "the 'Concord *Fight*' of an impending revolution."<sup>16</sup> Hardly had she read the first reports from Harper's Ferry than she wrote to the abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier, asking him to commemorate Brown's heroism in a poem akin to the famous "Concord Hymn" in which Emerson had immortalized the "embattled farmers" who had "fired the shot heard round the world."<sup>17</sup>

Child herself elected a different mode of showing her solidarity with Brown--offering to nurse him. "Dear Capt Brown," she wrote:

Believing in peace principles, I cannot sympathize with the method you chose to advance the cause of freedom. But I honor your generous intentions, I admire your courage, moral and physical, I reverence you for the humanity which tempered your zeal, I sympathize with your cruel bereavements, your sufferings, and your wrongs. . . .  
 . . . I think of you night and day, bleeding in prison,



surrounded by hostile faces, sustained only by trust in God, and your own strong heart. I long to nurse you, to speak to you sisterly words of sympathy and consolation.<sup>18</sup>

Once again, as in her reaction to the 1856 caning of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, Child was expressing an impulse with complex roots and multiple meanings. Brown's "bereavements" as a parent and the "sufferings" he was enduring as he awaited a probable death sentence may have linked him in Child's mind with both the mother she had refused to nurse and the father to whom she had just devoted three years of filial care. Brown also represented an alter ego for Child. He had shown himself willing to lay down his life for the slave, and his self-sacrifice both inspired and humbled her. "Conscience twinges me now and then, that I ever turned aside from . . . duty [to the slave], to dally in primrose paths," Child would later acknowledge.<sup>19</sup> Brown's example no doubt provoked one of these "twinges." On the anniversary of his execution, she would confide to his widow: "I have resolved henceforth to wear only black and brown; that when I am tempted to grow tired of reform-work, which I must confess is foreign to my natural *taste*, I may think of John Brown's example. . . ." <sup>20</sup> By volunteering to nurse him in prison, Child was similarly affiliating herself with Brown and doing penance for having failed to live up to the standard of dedication he had set.

Events would direct her toward a much more productive means of honoring Brown's "example," however. She had always served the antislavery cause best through her writings. By a fortunate twist of fate, her letter to Brown would turn into one of her most famous antislavery tracts and "constitute a permanent portion of the thrilling history of the Harper's Ferry tragedy," as the *Liberator* put it. The result aptly illustrated Child's observation that "by far the most efficient co-laborers we [abolitionists] have ever had have been the Slave States themselves,"<sup>21</sup> for it was Governor Henry Wise of Virginia who began this transmogrification.

Child had sent her letter to Brown along with one addressed to the Governor--officially Brown's chief custodian--in which she formally requested permission to nurse the wounded martyr. To avoid any imputation of seeking favors on false pretences, she identified herself at the outset: "I have been for years an uncompromising abolitionist, and I should scorn to deny it or apologize for it as much as John Brown himself would do." She also took pains to spell out how she and her fellow abolitionists viewed Brown's action. None had expected or approved of it, she asserted, but all felt the same sympathy for the fallen hero. Lest Wise misconstrue her stand on slave rebellion, she added pointedly: "[I]f I believed our religion justified men in fighting for freedom, I should consider the enslaved everywhere as best entitled to that right." She nevertheless promised not to air her abolitionist opinions in Virginia, should Wise grant her permission to come.<sup>22</sup>

Wise replied with all the affable courtesy of a Southern gentleman. Noting that she had a Constitutional right to visit Virginia for the "avowed purpose" of ministering to a "captive in prison," he assured her that he would fulfill his duty to uphold the Constitution by protecting her. "Virginia and her authorities would be weak indeed--weak in point of folly and weak in point of power--if her State faith and Constitutional obligations cant be redeemed in her own limits. . . . Every arm which guards Brown from rescue on the one hand and from Lynch-Law on the other, will be ready to guard your person in Virginia," he claimed. At the same time, Wise cautioned Child against the "imprudence of risking any experiment upon the peace of a society very much excited by the crimes, with whose chief author" she seemed to "sympathize so much." He ended by lecturing her on the "error" of sympathizing with Brown yet professing "surprise" at his action. She was as guilty as Brown of having "whetted knives of butchery for our 'Mothers, sisters,' daughters 'and babes,'" Wise charged: "His attempt was a natural consequence of your sympathy."<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, Wise thought he had scored a propaganda

victory from which the Northern public might benefit, for he sent copies of his exchange with Child to the press. He quickly learned that he had underestimated an adversary who had long ago pierced the mask of Southern chivalry and mastered the art of propaganda. Child wasted no time regaining the advantage in the battle to win over Northern public opinion. She promptly sent an "Explanatory Letter" to the *New York Tribune*, accompanied by the answer she had received from John Brown in the interim.<sup>24</sup> Together, the two letters presented Brown and his abolitionist supporters not as bloodthirsty fanatics, but as unassuming and level-headed good Samaritans. "My proposal to go and nurse that brave and generous old man, who so willingly gives his life a sacrifice for God's oppressed poor, originated in a very simple and unmeritorious impulse of kindness," Child affirmed (13). Other admirers of Brown in her circle, including her niece,<sup>25</sup> had shared that impulse, but her "age and state of health" had made her the most suitable candidate. She had packed her trunk with bandage supplies and prepared to "slip away quietly, without having the affair made public." Yet Governor Wise's admonition against inflaming an already "excited" populace had made her fear that her arrival might jeopardize whatever chance Brown had of obtaining a fair trial. Taking counsel with her husband, she had decided to await "a reply from Captain Brown himself" before proceeding (13).

Brown's letter served to provide renewed proof of his courage and selflessness. "I should certainly be greatly pleased to become personally acquainted with one so gifted; & so kind," he responded (indicating his awareness of Child's reputation). He no longer needed nursing, however, and his jailer, "a most humane gentleman" (to whom all the prisoners paid tribute), was giving him "every possible attention." Could he suggest "another channel" for the sympathies of his friends--to "constitute a little fund" for the support of his bereaved family, consisting of his wife, several helpless children, and the widows of the sons and kin who had fallen with him at Harper's Ferry (15)? Published under the title "JOHN BROWN'S LETTER TO LYDIA MARIA CHILD.



THE TRUE AID AND COMFORT TO THE DOOMED OLD MAN," the letter launched a fundraising campaign for the martyrs of Harper's Ferry. Child would extend that campaign well beyond Brown's family members, reminding contributors not to overlook "the *other* sufferers . . . , especially the *colored* men," and inquiring whether any of the African Americans had "left wives, children, or mothers, destitute."<sup>26</sup>

Child did not content herself with indirectly countering the chivalric pose Wise had struck as a statesman committed to upholding the Constitution that Northern abolitionists were violating. She fired off a long rejoinder, which appeared in the *Tribune* a week later.<sup>27</sup> "Your constitutional obligation, for which you profess so much respect, has never proved any protection to citizens of the Free States, who happened to have a black, brown, or yellow complexion; nor to any white citizen whom you even suspected of entertaining opinions opposite to your own" on the slavery question, Child pointed out, referring to the imprisonment and enslavement of "colored seamen" whose ships touched at Southern ports, and to notorious cases of men hounded out of the South for their supposed antislavery views (6-7). How could Wise consistently arraign Brown for treason, she asked, when he and his fellow Southerners had "threatened to trample on the Constitution, and break the Union, if a majority of the legal voters" in the United States "dared to elect a President unfavorable to the extension of Slavery" (7)? Contrary to Wise's allegations, Brown's scheme was the "natural consequence" not of abolitionist agitation, but of "the continual, and constantly-increasing aggressions of the Slave Power," Child argued (9). She proceeded to recapitulate these aggressions, from the gag laws through which proslavery politicians had tried to muzzle free speech in Congress to the lynch law through which their henchmen had tried to impose slavery in Kansas. "Because slaveholders so recklessly sowed the wind in Kansas, they reaped a whirlwind at Harper's Ferry," she contended (12). She wound up by predicting that a majority of Northerners "would rejoice to have the Slave States fulfill their oft-

repeated threat of withdrawal from the Union" (12).

Thanks to Wise, Child's offer to nurse Brown, which she had meant as a private, womanly gesture, ended up attracting as much notoriety as had Brown's interview, and serving the antislavery cause almost as effectively. The Governor's ungentlemanly effort to expose Child to public censure had gained her a "Southern audience" she could never otherwise have reached, she noted wryly.<sup>28</sup> Her audience multiplied tenfold nationwide when Margaretta Mason, wife of Virginia's Senator James M. Mason, joined the fray. Mrs. Mason's vituperative letter, published in the Virginia press, opened with the rebuke: "Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, 'Woe unto you, hypocrites'" (16). Accusing Child of ignoring the "objects of charity" on her doorstep--the northern white poor--and confining her "sympathy" to a man who had sought to unleash a "servile war" against the men, women, and children of her own race, Mrs. Mason exhorted her to take a lesson in true charity from the slaveholding matrons of the South:

[W]ould *you* stand by the bedside of an old negro, dying of a hopeless disease, to alleviate his sufferings as far as human aid could? Have *you* ever watched the last, lingering illness of a consumptive, to soothe, as far as in you lay, the inevitable fate? Do *you* soften the pangs of maternity in those around you by all the care and comfort you can give?... Did *you* ever sit up until the 'wee hours' to complete a dress for a motherless child, that she might appear on Christmas day in a new one...? (16-17)

As Child's large Northern readership would have known, Mrs. Mason could hardly have chosen a more inappropriate target for such reproaches than the author who had dedicated so many years of her life to alleviating the sufferings of everyone around her, regardless of race. Mrs. Mason's parting shot misfired even more clumsily. Unaware that Child had been tabooed in the South ever since publishing her first abolition-

ist book twenty-seven years earlier, Mrs. Mason pontificated: "no Southerner ought, after your letter to Governor Wise and to Brown, to read a line of your composition. . . " (17).

Like Governor Wise, the Virginian Senator's wife would emerge badly worsted from her self-initiated public exchange with the abolitionist movement's most skillful propagandist. Child answered her in an eleven-page letter, which she sent to the *New York Tribune* with a confidential note to editor Horace Greeley. Her aim, she told Greeley, was to provide "entering wedges" for antislavery arguments that might sway voters in favor of the Republican party.<sup>29</sup> Taking her cue from Mrs. Mason, Child began with an array of Biblical texts--eighteen quotations sustaining an antislavery interpretation of Christianity, compared to the two Mrs. Mason had cited for proslavery purposes. She followed with a brilliant summary of her myriad antislavery tracts, using southern law codes, advertisements for fugitives, the testimony of converted slaveholders, and the avowals of southern politicians to establish the brutality of slavery. She then urged Mrs. Mason to examine dispassionately the benefits the South would derive from emancipation, and to weigh them against the costs of maintaining an institution that depended for its survival on "despotic measures . . . to silence investigation." "Your letter to me is published in Northern papers, as well as Southern; but my reply will not be allowed to appear in any Southern paper," Child underscored (26). Southerners were not only sacrificing their own liberties but courting their own destruction for the sake of preserving slavery, she warned: "In this enlightened age, all despotisms *ought* to come to an end by the agency of moral and rational means. But if they resist such agencies, it is in the order of Providence that they *must* come to an end by violence" (26). Turning at last to the "personal questions" Mrs. Mason had raised about her practical philanthropy, Child answered them impersonally "in the name of all the women of New England":

It would be extremely difficult to find any woman in our villages who does *not* sew for the poor, and watch with



the sick, whenever occasion requires. We pay our domestics generous wages, with which they can purchase as many Christmas gowns as they please; a process far better for their characters, as well as our own, than to receive their clothing as a charity, after being deprived of just payment for their labor. I have never known an instance where the 'pangs of maternity' did not meet with requisite assistance; and here at the North, after we have helped the mothers, *we do not sell the babies.* (26)

There could be little disagreement as to which party had won the debate. In Garrison's words, "Mrs. Child has 'pulverized' Governor Wise . . . and thoroughly 'used up' Mrs. Mason."<sup>30</sup>

Reprinted in newspapers across the country, Child's correspondence with Brown, Governor Wise, and Mrs. Mason elicited scores of responses. Southerners smeared her with "the most *inconceivable* scurrility and abuse," their "violent and filthy" language furnishing "a new revelation of the degrading effects of the slave system upon human nature."<sup>31</sup> They also slandered her in the press, with the help of their northern "dough-face" allies. A correspondent of the New Orleans *Picayune*, for example, planted a rumor zealously circulated by antiabolitionist newspapers throughout the nation. "[T]he would-be sympathizer and nurse of the old rascal Brown," reported the *Picayune*, had abandoned a crippled daughter who was being generously supported by a Mississippi slaveholder.<sup>32</sup> In the same vein, a Northern Democratic newspaper took advantage of a recent local tragedy that had produced a hundred casualties to sneer: *Why is it . . . that we do not hear of the presence of Lydia Maria Child at this scene of woe?* It is true that she would find no . . . cold-blooded murderers" or "fragrant, intellectual, ideal Negro" to "clasp in a chaste, sisterly embrace. . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Such slurs did not typify the reaction of Northern readers, however. The vast majority "overwhelmed" Child with "letters of laudation," frequently enclosing contributions to the fund for Brown's family and manifesting a degree of esteem for the old man himself that indicated an astounding transformation

of public consciousness.<sup>34</sup> "It is not often that I read anything on the extreme abolition side of the slavery question with such hearty unmixed satisfaction," wrote a conservative Northerner, convinced that "[h]undreds of thousands" had greeted Child's "admirable Epistle" to Mrs. Mason with the same enthusiasm.<sup>35</sup> "I know of nothing . . . that has commanded such universal respect and gratitude as those words of yours," echoed a well known specialist in oriental languages, who confided in passing that he had once "fed" with "delight" on the *Juvenile Miscellany*.<sup>36</sup> "You were inspired to write that letter. I hear of it all around me," confirmed Child's old friend Eliza Lee Cabot Follen, wishing it could be "sent to every house in the land."<sup>37</sup> African Americans were especially moved by Child's letter to Brown. The poet Frances Ellen Watkins [Harper], whose verses Child pronounced "very clever," wrote to thank her for paying tribute to a man who had "reached out his brave and generous hand to the crushed and blighted of my race."<sup>38</sup> And a "colored man from Ohio" asked Child for her photograph, which he wanted to enshrine alongside Brown's. "We desire to hand down to our posterity, in connection with the tragic scene at Harper's Ferry, the pictures of two honest persons," he explained.<sup>39</sup>

Child's abolitionist comrades soon realized that her exchanges with John Brown, Governor Wise, and Mrs. Mason were revolutionizing public opinion. To capitalize on an instrumentality they hoped would "work the overthrow of the slave system by . . . moral power, without the aid of invasion or insurrection," the American Anti-Slavery Society reissued the entire set of letters as a tract. Sold for five cents a piece (and less in large quantities), the *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia* reached the unprecedented circulation of 300,000 copies.<sup>40</sup> At Child's behest, the tract was also sent to British newspapers and to foreign progressives whose support abolitionists hoped to enlist--among them the writers Harriet Martineau, Mary Howitt, and Victor Hugo, and the Hungarian and Italian revolutionaries Louis Kossuth and Giuseppe

Mazzini.<sup>41</sup> If Harper's Ferry represented the "Concord Fight" of a second American Revolution, Child's incisive letters articulated the "Common Sense" that mobilized her generation to wage that struggle.

True, Child did not literally call for a war against slavery. Yet she did draw the battle lines and instill a determination to resist further encroachments by the Slave Power, whatever the cost. The tone of her *Correspondence* with Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason differs strikingly from that of her 1833 *Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* and her 1836 *Anti-Slavery Catechism*. Gone are the conciliatory rhetoric and the beseeching posture that characterized the earlier tracts. No longer does Child plead with her interlocutor in the accents of Isaiah, "Come, . . . let us reason together" (Is. 1.18). The rhetoric of the *Correspondence* is accusatory and openly sectional, pitting "you" of the South against "us" of the North. It fuels the anger of Northern readers who have reached the limits of their endurance after thirty years of submitting to Southern dictation, and it serves notice to Southern readers that the time for concessions and compromises has passed. The solution Child holds out is disunion, rather than war. If the South secedes, slavery will crumble, she implies. Slaves will be able to escape to the free states without fear of being remanded to their owners by Northern judges, and slaveholders will have to face insurrections without the aid of Federal troops to suppress them. Meanwhile the North will finally be free to "give the world the example of a real republic" (12).

In the end, of course, this scenario would prove chimerical. The Northern public would not accept the dismemberment of the Union, and the slaveholding oligarchy would launch a preemptive strike to neutralize the threat to its peculiar institution. Although Child hoped to the last that her compatriots would elect to bring about emancipation by peaceful means, she steeled herself to "go steadily forward to the slave's rescue," be the consequence insurrection or civil war. Explaining the militant stance she had taken against Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason, she wrote to her friend



Sarah Shaw:

It is plainly wrong to be silent in view of such outrages as the colored people suffer in this country; outrages in which we at the North are compelled to become more and more *accomplices*, yet God alone knows how many John Brown's we *may* wake up, when we 'cry aloud and spare not'. . . . I *must* stand by the poor slave, come what will. . . . Nay, shrinking and quivering at every nerve, I would *still* do it, if I *knew* their pathway to freedom must be 'over their master's bodies.' There is no help for it. We *must* go on, or the whole country will become enslaved, and *directly* implicated in the sin of slaveholding. . . . If we don't stand up, like men, [the slave states] will bring us more and more under the yoke. They will ruin *us*, without helping *themselves*; for the string drawn too tightly will snap at last, and the end will come in blood.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, seeing no possibility that silent complicity in slavery would avert either insurrection or war, Child resolutely took the risk of exhorting her northern compatriots to "stand up, like men" and refuse to yield another inch to the South. Loyalty to the slave took precedence over every other consideration. Such was the lesson she derived from John Brown.

Amidst the flurry of exchanging broadsides with Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason, answering twenty or thirty letters a week from admiring or irate readers, and collecting funds for the families of Brown and his men, Child anxiously followed the trials at Harper's Ferry. Within less than two weeks of their capture, Brown and four of his followers--the African Americans John A. Copeland, Jr. and Shields Green and the whites Edwin Coppoc and John E. Cook--were indicted and found guilty of murder, treason against the State of Virginia, and conspiracy to foment slave insurrection.<sup>43</sup> Brown was sentenced to be executed on December 2, the others on

December 16. The trials of two remaining members of the band, Aaron Dwight Stevens and Albert Hazlett, were postponed until February.

At his sentencing, Brown transformed the brief statement he was allowed by the court into what Child called "a most effective anti-slavery document,"<sup>44</sup> reprinted by newspapers all over the country. "[H]ad I . . . interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends . . . every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment," he contended. Drawing attention to the New Testament prominently displayed in the courtroom, and again quoting the Golden Rule, he added:

. . . I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done . . . in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments,--I submit, so let it be done.<sup>45</sup>

"What a success [Brown] has made of failure, by the moral grandeur of own his character!" Child exulted.<sup>46</sup> His moving words, crowned by his martyrdom, would do more to arouse the nation against slavery than he could ever have achieved by carrying out his original scheme, she predicted: "No peace and quietness for Slavery after this!"<sup>47</sup>

The day of Brown's hanging was marked by solemn observances. Child helped Garrison organize the evening commemoration at Tremont Temple, at which that lifelong nonresistant proclaimed to "[e]nthusiastic applause": "as a peace man--an 'ultra' peace man--I am prepared to say, 'Success to every slave insurrection at the South, and in every slave country.'"<sup>48</sup> Seeking an atmosphere "congenial to [her] tender state of mind," she spent the intervening hours

attending an all-day prayer meeting at a Black church. "There was no doubt of [Brown's] sanity, no division of opinion concerning the reverence and gratitude due to his memory," she observed with satisfaction. Child took comfort from the African American community's clear-cut verdict: "He was the friend of their persecuted race, and he had proved it by dying for them." She was especially touched by the eloquent prayer of an "old black man who informed the Lord that he 'had been a slave, and knew how *bitter* it was,' [and who] ejaculated, with great fervor: 'And since it has pleased Thee to take away our Moses, Oh, Lord God! raise us up a Joshua.'" <sup>49</sup>

Although Child longed to share her Black brothers' and sisters' unambivalent response to Brown, her pacifist convictions posed an insurmountable obstacle. In one of the speeches she heard that night at Tremont Temple, the African American minister J. Sella Martin summed up the differences between his community's interpretation of the Harper's Ferry tragedy and that of the white speakers, most of whom had stressed Brown's assertion that he had not intended to "shed blood." "In my opinion, speaking as a military critic," Martin retorted, "this was one of the faults of his plan. In not shedding blood, he left the slaves uncertain how to act." <sup>50</sup> Child could not adopt the "military" viewpoint of an oppressed people who knew their liberation could only be won by arms. Indeed she never fully resolved her contradictory feelings about Brown's recourse to violence. If he had not seized the arsenal, but had simply conducted a bloodless slave rescue, she would be "more completely satisfied with his martyrdom," she admitted privately to her niece. "But he liked Old Testament heroes better than I do." <sup>51</sup> Publicly, Child, like Garrison, maintained that none but pacifists who were prepared to condemn war "under *any* circumstances" had the right to condemn Brown. Others must judge him by the standard of the American Revolution. "It is very inconsistent to eulogise Lafayette for volunteering to aid in *our* fight for freedom, while we blame John Brown for going to the rescue of those who are a thousand times more oppressed



than we ever were, and who have none to help them," she argued in a letter to the *Liberator*. Even pacifists would do well to examine their consciences before criticizing a man who had dared to sacrifice his life for his principles, she continued: "Instead of blaming [Brown] for carrying out his own convictions by means we cannot sanction, it would be more profitable for us to inquire of ourselves whether we, who believe in a 'more excellent way,' have carried our convictions into practice, as faithfully as he did *his*." She concluded that abolitionists had not exerted their "*moral influence*" strenuously enough to effect the peaceful emancipation they favored: "And because *we* have thus failed to perform our duty in the 'more excellent way,' the end cometh 'by violence; because come it *must*."<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, Child would judge Brown not by external standards, whether religious or political, but by his moral effect on her: "Others may spend their time in debating whether John Brown did wrong, or not; whether he was sane, or not; all I know, or care to know, is that his example has stirred me up to consecrate myself with renewed earnestness to the righteous cause for which he died so bravely."<sup>53</sup> The lesson she would draw from John Brown, she vowed to his widow, would be to "work for the oppressed, as diligently and fearlessly in *my* line, as he did in *his*."<sup>54</sup>

#### Notes

1. Lydia Maria Child to Maria Weston Chapman, 11 Jan. 1860, *The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880*, ed. Patricia G. Holland, Milton Meltzer, and Francine Krasno (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Microform, 1980) microfiche card 43, letter #1181. In subsequent footnotes, Child will be referred to as LMC and this microfiche collection of her complete correspondence will be referred to as CC, with a slash mark dividing microfiche card and letter number. Child had entered the abolitionist movement shortly after William Lloyd Garrison began publishing his famous newspaper *The Liberator* in January 1831 and had made her mark on it with *An*

*Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833), the first book to advocate the immediate abolition of slavery and the cessation of all racial discrimination. She had gone on to produce many other tracts, besides editing the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, from 1841 to 1843.

2. LMC to Charles Sumner, 7 Jul. 1856, *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1982) 283, hereinafter referred to as *SL*. For details on the schisms in the antislavery movement leading to the rupture between Child and Chapman, and on the Kansas crisis, see Chapters 12 and 16 of the larger study from which this essay has been extracted.

3. LMC to Mary Ann Brown, 2 Dec. 1860, *CC* 47/1271.

4. LMC to Sarah Shaw, 17 June 1859, *CC* 41/1112. By 1859 Garrison had moved much closer to the position Child had held in 1856. He, too, now acknowledged that the Republican party had played an important role in preventing the extension of slavery and that it was helping to lead the country in the right direction. See Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*, 4 vols. (1885; rpt. New York: Arno, 1969) 3: 483-85, hereinafter referred to as *Life*, and Garrison's comments at the Convention, as reported in "New England Anti-Slavery Convention," *Liberator* 3 June 1859, pp. 85-87. Most of the speakers noted the changed temper of public opinion and the great advances in the antislavery cause. Child served on the Business Committee.

5. Brown's words have been rendered differently by different sources. See Franklin B. Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891) 131, 421; Garrison and Garrison, *Life* 3: 488; and Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, 2nd ed. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984) 271-72.

6. The other two members of the "Secret Six" who backed Brown were Samuel Gridley Howe, also personally known to Child, and Franklin B. Sanborn. By May 1859 Parker was dying of tuberculosis in Rome, but he had helped fund Brown until his departure and "wished to see [Brown's plan] tried, believing that it must do good even if it failed" (Sanborn 440). In addition to Sanborn, see Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (1898; rpt New York: Arno, 1968) 216-

## 40 - RACE TRAITOR

34; and Frank Preston Stearns, *The Life and Public Service of George Luther Stearns* (1907; New York: Arno, 1969) Chaps. 10, 12, 13.

7. LMC to John Brown, 16 Nov. 1859, *SL* 328.

8. LMC to Charles Sumner, 7 Jul. 1856, *SL* 285.

9. See Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892; New York: Collier, 1962) 314-15, 319; and Sanborn 425, 434-36, 438-40, 450, 466, 541-42. A letter to Sanborn of 24 Feb. 1858 suggests that Brown may even then have been conceiving of a suicide mission like "the last victory of Samson" (Sanborn 444).

10. Sanborn 552-54; Osborne Perry Anderson, *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (1861; New York: World View, 1980) 68.

11. Brown's letter of 7 Mar. 1858 to Theodore Parker indicates that he was already planning to use hostage-taking as a means of educating slaveholders, first by making them "virtually slaves themselves," and then by trying to appeal to their consciences through "abolition lectures" and "kindness and plain dealing, instead of barbarous and cruel treatment, such as they might give. . . ." (qtd. in Sanborn 449). Some historians have suggested that Brown may have been waiting for slaves to join him; see Oates 294 and James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine, 1989) 206. The first to "infer" this was James Redpath in *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown, with an Auto-Biography of His Childhood and Youth* (1860; rpt. Sandusky: Kinney Brothers, 1872) 251. Osborne Anderson's account indicates that "many colored men" did in fact join the raiders and that several anonymous slaves were killed in the battle (71-73, 96-98). See also Redpath 246, 253-54, 267-68.

12. Sanborn 562.

13. Sanborn 559, 568; Anderson 79; Oates 300.

14. For biographical sketches of Francis Jackson Merriam and the other raiders, based partly on interviews with the survivors, see Richard J. Hinton, *John Brown and His Men: With Some Account of the Roads They Traveled to Reach Harper's Ferry* (1894; rpt. New York: Arno, 1968). Child refers to Merriam's role in the raid in letters to Francis Jackson and Anna Loring, 4 Nov. and 13 Dec. 1859, *CC* 41/1130, 42/1146.



15. Sanborn 565-66, 568. Originally published in the *New York Herald*, this interview was reprinted in newspapers across the country, including the *Liberator*, and in most early biographies of Brown. Oates flatly asserts that Brown lied about his purposes (278-81, 306, 326-27, 345), yet the testimony of Douglass, Higginson, and others suggests that Brown may have envisaged a series of guerilla raids, rather than a massive slave insurrection on the model of Nat Turner's or the St. Domingo revolutionaries'.

16. LMC to William Lloyd Garrison, 28 Oct. 1859, *SL* 326.

17. Whittier refused because his pacifist convictions did not allow him to "lend *any* countenance" to violence; see John Greenleaf Whittier to LMC, 21 Oct. 1859, *CC* 41/1122. Child's letter to Whittier has not been preserved, but its contents can be inferred from his reply and from her letter to Garrison, cited above.

18. LMC to John Brown, 26 Oct. 1859, *SL* 324-25.

19. LMC to Lucretia Mott, 26 Feb. 1861, *SL* 376-77. I discuss the caning of Charles Sumner and the psychobiographical roots of Child's impulse to rush to Washington to nurse Sumner in the Prologue and Chapter 16 of *"The First Woman in the Republic"*. Child's early youth was marked by the three-year illness and death of her mother, which left her with unresolved feelings of anger and guilt. In an autobiographical story titled "My Mother's Grave," Child describes how she refused to bring her mother a glass of water and awoke the next morning to find her mother dead. See the *Juvenile Miscellany* 3 (January 1828): 310-313.

20. LMC to Mary Ann Brown, 2 Dec. 1860, *CC* 47/1271.

21. LMC to Henry Wise, *CC* 41/1128.

22. LMC to Governor Henry Alexander Wise, 26 Oct. 1859, *SL* 325-26.

23. Henry Wise to LMC, 29 Oct. 1859, *CC* 41/1127. I am quoting the manuscript letter, which differs slightly from the printed version.

## 42 - RACE TRAITOR

24. John Brown to LMC and LMC to the Editor of the *New York Tribune*, 4 and 10 Nov. 1859, *CC* 42/1132-33. Child's letters to Brown and Wise, with Wise's reply, appear in the *New York Weekly Tribune* of 12 Nov. 1859, p. 7, under the title "MRS. CHILD, GOV. WISE, AND JOHN BROWN." Her own letter to the *Tribune*, with Brown's reply, appears in the *New York Weekly Tribune* of 19 Nov. 1859, p. 6. The entire body of correspondence was published in the tract *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860). Page references to the letters in this tract will be given parenthetically in the text.

25. Child is no doubt referring to Mary Stearns, who had come to love the old man intensely over the course of his many visits with her family. See the reminiscence by Mary Stearns reprinted in Sanborn 509-11. Child's reference to her niece seems surprisingly indiscreet, considering that George Luther Stearns and several of Brown's other supporters had fled to Canada after the discovery of letters implicating them in the Harper's Ferry attack.

26. LMC to Edward Fitch Bullard, Oliver Johnson, and Aaron Stevens, 19 and 20 Dec. 1859, *CC* 42/1151-53 and *SL* 335. John Brown to LMC, 4 Nov. 1859, *CC* 42/1132.

27. "LYDIA MARIA CHILD'S REPLY TO GOV. WISE," *New York Weekly Tribune* 26 Nov. 1859, p. 4.

28. LMC to Parke Godwin, 27 Nov. 1859, *SL* 330.

29. LMC to Horace Greeley, 18 Dec. 1859, *SL* 333.

30. Review of *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia*, *Liberator* 27 Jan. 1860, p. 14.

31. LMC to Parke Godwin, 27 Nov. 1859, *SL* 330; LMC to Daniel Ricketson, 22 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1156; also LMC to Maria Weston Chapman 28 Nov. 1859, *CC* 42/1141.

32. "Mrs. Child's Humanity," reprinted in the *Liberator* 30 Mar. 1860, p. 49.

33. Reprinted from *Worcester Bay State*, *Liberator* 27 Jan. 1860, p. 13. "Fragrant" is misprinted as "fragment."

34. LMC to Peter and Susan Lesley and Parke Godwin, *SL* 329-30. Child preserved only a small fraction of the letters she received, which averaged fifteen to twenty a week for several weeks. She refers to answering as many as twenty-three letters in a single week. See LMC to Sarah Shaw, 22 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1157.
35. Wm. H. Armstrong to LMC, 25 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1166.
36. Samuel Johnson to LMC, 1-3 Feb. 1860, *CC* 44/1196.
37. Eliza Lee Cabot Follen to LMC, [7 Dec. 1859], *CC* 42/1144.
38. Harper's letter is quoted in LMC to Mary Ann Brown, 23 Dec. 1859, *SL* 337-38. Child told Mrs. Brown that she had received letters "from colored people in various parts of the country."
39. Samuel Jackson to LMC, "Letter from a Colored Man in Ohio to L. Maria Child," *Liberator* 23 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1158.
40. Review of *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia*, *Liberator* 27 Jan. 1860, p. 14; *SL* 333.
41. LMC to Maria Weston Chapman, 7 and 11 Jan. 1860, *CC* 43/1177, 1181.
42. LMC to Sarah Shaw, 28 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1169. This letter comments directly on the letter to Mrs. Mason.
43. A number of historians have commented on the many violations of due process committed during the hasty trial--among others the anomaly of trying Brown for treason against a state of which he was neither a citizen nor a resident. See, for example, Richard Morris, *Fair Trial*, qtd. in Louis Ruchames, *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words, in the Words of Those Who Knew Him, and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959) 29.
44. LMC to Peter and Susan Lesley, 20 Nov. 1859, *SL* 329.



#### 44 - RACE TRAITOR

45. Qtd. in Hinton 362-63. Like Brown's interview with Wise, Mason, and Vallandigham, this statement to the court was widely reprinted in the newspapers. Garrison read it to the audience at the Tremont Temple commemoration on December 2. See "Great Meeting in Boston on the Day of the Execution of Captain John Brown," *Liberator* 9 Dec. 1859, p. 194.

46. LMC to Maria Weston Chapman, 28 Nov. 1859, *CC* 42/1141.

47. LMC to Peter and Susan Lesley, 20 Nov. 1859, *SL* 329.

48. On Child's role in organizing the meeting, see LMC to Maria Weston Chapman, 28 Nov. 1859, *CC* 42/1141. "Speech of Wm. Lloyd Garrison, At the Meeting in Tremont Temple, Dec. 2d, relating to the Execution of John Brown," *Liberator* 16 Dec. 1859, p. 198; partially reprinted in Truman Nelson, ed., *Documents of Upheaval: Selections from William Lloyd Garrison's THE LIBERATOR, 1831-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966) 263-67.

49. LMC to Sarah Shaw, 22 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1157. See also LMC to Sarah Parsons, 25 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1165.

50. "Great Meeting in Boston on the Day of the Execution of Captain John Brown. Speech of Rev. J.S. Martin," *Liberator* 9 Dec. 1859, p. 194, reprinted in Benjamin Quarles, ed. *Blacks on John Brown* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1972) 25-31. The quotation is on p. 28. Osborne Anderson implies a similar critique in his comments on the confusion Brown seemed to be showing on the morning of the attack (73, 75).

51. LMC to Sarah Preston Parsons, 25 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1165. Sarah Parsons and Mary Stearns were the daughters of Child's sister Mary Francis Preston.

52. Comments appended to "Letter from a Colored Man in Ohio to L. Maria Child," *Liberator* 23 Dec. 1859, *CC* 43/1158.

53. LMC to Maria Weston Chapman, 22 Dec. 1859, *CC* 42/1155.

54. LMC to Mary Ann Brown, 2 Dec. 1860, *CC* 47/1271; also 23 Dec. 1859, *SL* 337-38.

# The American Intifada

Noel Ignatiev

***Editors note.** The following essay was written in the fall of 1991 (six months before the Los Angeles uprising) for a symposium in New Politics on the question, "Is There Life After the AFL-CIO?" For reasons best known to themselves, the editors of New Politics, who had solicited the piece, chose not to publish it. The writer has made minor changes.*

Just about the time the Democratic Reform Progressive Concerned Rank-and-File Fightback Caucus ousts the last remaining clique of right-wing bureaucrats from local union office, unions as we know them will cease to exist, and the radicals of various stripes who placed their hopes on union reform will be left in undisputed possession of a dead horse.

The strength of unionism was a component of a social-democratic compact, the American Historic Compromise. Since white supremacy was the cement that held it together, it is fitting that the black workers led in toppling the deal; but they were not alone. The working class used the gains of a period of accumulation to launch a struggle that went beyond unionism. New forms emerged, based upon shop-floor organization, direct action, and community solidarity. The struggle was against the capital relation itself and it invaded all spheres. If Dodge Main and Lordstown were the high points of the conflict at the point of production, they cannot be understood apart from Watts, Columbia, and Attica.

Because the unions could no longer discipline the workers in the mass production industries, the employers withdrew their support for the collective bargaining system and began a new round of union-busting, computerization, and relocation; the amount of functioning plant and equipment they were

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willing to scuttle in the search for a more malleable labor force is the exact index of their fear of the working class.

In America, the comic futility of the Democratic Party, and in Europe, the course of French Socialism as well as the defeat of the Party of Austerity, Swedish Section of the Second International, herald the bright future of social-democracy, which is brought closer by the integration into the world market of the low-wage areas formerly (or still) ruled by Communist Parties. (This does not rule out the possibility of the Democrats returning to office and repeating the whole dreary cycle, until they are dispersed by a Nazi corporal and nine soldiers or--something else.) "For the rest," wrote Hegel, "it is not difficult to see that our epoch is a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of the time, growing slowly and quietly ripe for the new form it is to assume, disintegrates one fragment after another of the structure of its previous world."

The old is dying and the new has not yet been born. The paradox of the moment is that, while social-democracy can no longer call forth the energies of the revolutionary class, the forms of activity that anticipate the new society do not yet constitute a visible alternative. Where to look for them?

For most of the four centuries of its existence, capitalism has meant one or another form of bound labor: slavery, indentured servitude, apprenticeship, prison labor, peonage, etc. The formally free, waged proletarian prevailed only in some branches of production in a few countries for a certain period. The political forms associated with "free" labor--the electoral franchise and collective bargaining--have been exceptions in history. Now as capital dissolves the large concentrations of workers in the mass production industries, "once again, the physiognomy of the world proletariat is that of the pauper, the vagabond, the criminal, the panhandler, the street peddler, the refugee sweatshop worker, the mercenary, the rioter"<sup>1</sup> and the prison rebellion, squatting, and the food riot become the characteristic forms of proletarian resistance. The *intifada* is the mass strike of our day.



Are there any hints of an approaching American *intifada*? I cite three.

(1) A few years ago, in some cities, jobs in the fast-food industry that traditionally paid the minimum wage were going begging despite a wage rate in some cases as high as \$5.50 per hour. The increase in the minimum wage, which the unions had sought without success, the black youth who normally filled those jobs accomplished by direct action. Those young people are the sector of American society least touched by official institutions. No one knows how they communicated and enforced agreement among themselves as to what constitutes an acceptable wage, whether they boycotted the jobs entirely or worked them only long enough to buy a new pair of hundred-dollar sneakers or sunglasses, but their ability to act cohesively means that the forces of the *intifada* are gathering.

(2) Numerous observers have identified as a product of oppression the high proportion of children of black mothers born out of wedlock. It is more than that. The large numbers of young women who are having children despite the absence of a husband with a dependable wage are doing so with full knowledge of the consequences; they are aware, from observation, that raising a child on welfare closes off their chances of escaping the poverty that surrounds them. To give birth under those circumstances must be viewed, therefore, as a choice - to link their future and that of their child with the community they belong to, above all with the women in it, rather than to pursue the limited opportunities for upward mobility that exist. It is a decision not to rise out of the working class but with it--a display of the kind of solidarity essential to an oppressed class preparing to assert itself.

(3) Years ago I knew a Chicago steel worker whose son liked to throw rocks at the buses that carried black workers to the mill. "I asked the kid," he recounted, "what do you want to bother the niggers for? They're just going to work." What led that young man, just out of high school, to elevate the white supremacy his father took for granted into a program for militant action? It was the knowledge that he

would never get the sort of decently paying, fairly steady job his father held--or the fear that he would. Many like him, for whom traditional union white supremacy with a human face can no longer deliver the goods, are turning towards national socialism.

I am aware of the pathological elements present in each of the examples I have cited. As currently manifest they are, at best, negations. Each, however, represents a departure from the conventional wisdom of reform, and each expresses a deeply felt sentiment that a total change is necessary.

As I write these lines, two items come to my attention. The first is a reference, in the *New Yorker*, of September 23, 1991, to black youth as "Brooklyn's *intifada*." The second is a fundraising letter from a civil rights group which recently won a twelve-and-a-half-million dollar lawsuit against Tom Metzger, head of the fascist organization, White Aryan Resistance. Since Metzger's personal fortune consists of a modest home, the legal strategists expected the suit to put him out of business. WAR, however, responded to the court decision with a declaration of war against the white liberal judges who uphold the system. This in turn led to the appeal for funds.

What clearer confession of futility than an appeal for donations immediately following a successful multi-million dollar lawsuit?

Only the vision of a new world can bring the angry proletarians who make up the WAR constituency together with the Brooklyn *intifada*. The black proletariat forms the historical antipode to capital. When the workers of the world learn to say, as did The Commitments, "I'm black and I'm proud"--the modern rendition of "Workers of all countries, unite!"--then the new world will be at hand. Will they learn it? No one can say; but one thing is certain: no regenerated social-democracy, no bigger and better welfare state, can compete with WAR for the allegiance of the alienated, dispossessed white youth.

The alternatives are the society of freely associated labor, or barbarism. There is no longer a difference between reform

and revolution. Put another way, no serious reform is possible without the overthrow of capital. The question is not how to defend the interests of the workers against the multi-national corporations, but how to maximize the revolutionary potential of the working class. Today the proletariat is subordinated to capital, and the expressions of its potential class rule are sporadic, fragmented, and imbricated in retrograde tendencies. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that we see through a glass darkly. Nonetheless, the rough beast slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.

#### Notes

1. The words in quotations are from *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1972-1992*, by the Midnight Notes Collective (New York: Autonomedia, 1992), p. 321.



## Bridges and Boundaries: Black-Jewish Relations

*Editors' note.* Recently there has been a stir over anti-Jewish sentiments among Afro-Americans. Some of those most vocal in condemning black anti-Jewishness have made reference to to a mythic black-Jewish alliance, which supposedly began around the turn of the century and lasted through the civil rights movement, until it was disrupted by militant black activists in the 1960s.

The documents which follow may help readers decide on the truth or falsity of that version of history. They consist of several letters occasioned by the exhibit, "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," which opened in March, 1992 at the Jewish Museum in New York City. We obtained them from Herbert Hill, Professor of Afro-American Studies and Industrial Relations at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who was directly involved in the original dispute to which they refer and was one of the parties in this recent exchange. According to a report in the New York Times of April 20, 1992, the exhibit as originally planned included material, specifically on racial discrimination in the garment industry before 1962 and on the 1967 Ocean-hill-Brownsville school controversy, to which the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, the United Federation of Teachers, and the Jewish Labor Committee objected. The Times story reported that "the exhibition's organizers have removed the allegation that the I.L.G.W.U. found offensive . . . ." The editors of Race Traitor tried several times, by mail and by telephone, to get in touch with Adina Back, who was the coordinator of the exhibit, but is no longer connected with the Jewish Museum, in order to get her version of how the Museum decided what material to exclude, but she did not return their calls.

**Jewish Labor Committee**  
**25 East 21st Street**  
**New York, N.Y. 10010-6297**

**January 2, 1992**  
**Ms. Adina Back**  
**Exhibition Coordinator**  
**"Bridges and Boundaries"**  
**The Jewish Museum**  
**1865 Broadway, 4th Floor**  
**New York, NY 10023**

**Dear Ms. Back:**

In response to our conversation about your exhibition, "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," I would like to make the following points.

Based on the material you have sent us, the Jewish Labor Committee cannot endorse your exhibition. The description of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, as well as the controversial Oceanhill-Brownsville affair and the United Federation of Teachers, are so inaccurate and portray these unions so inaccurately that we simply can neither endorse the exhibition nor let some of the statements and impressions given go unchallenged. In more general terms, the scope of the trade union movement (and the democratic left) as an arena for social change, and for interaction between African Americans and American Jews, is reduced beyond an acceptable level by an examination solely of the ILGWU, 1199, and the Communist Party.

Ms. Back, it is unclear from the material you have sent whether or not the NEH Grant Outline (henceforth NEH/GO) is being strictly followed as a guide in the organization of the exhibition. But as presented in the NEH/GO, a strong impression is conveyed that the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union supported segregation within their union. For instance, the (unattributed) "Sample Label" (for the section on the ILGWU) on page 30:

Out of both concern for African American workers and an interest in increasing their numbers, the largely Jewish International Ladies Garment Workers Union worked tirelessly in the 1920s and 30s to unionize Black workers. They were, at the

## 52 - RACE TRAITOR

time, a model for the nation. By 1946, 40% of the garment workers were Puerto Rican or Black women, but the top union management remained mostly Jewish. Family ties remained the way to top union positions which no longer represented a majority of the workers. Investigations of organized labor by the government and the NAACP in the 1960s revealed both race and sex discrimination. The ILGWU, the much hailed integrationist union of the 1930s, externally supported civil rights in the 1960s but internally did not respond to the new complexion of its members.

And from the "Sample Voices" on page 31:

Negro and Puerto Rican members of the ILGWU are discriminated against both in terms of wages and other conditions of employment and in their status as members of the Union.  
Herbert Hill, Labor Secretary, NAACP, 1962

Taken out of context, this quote does less than justice to the important work of the ILGWU against discrimination in the workplace, and in support of the rights of workers of all colors and backgrounds. The ILGWU, as well as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, (the ACWA, another "needles trades" union with a historically large Jewish membership), refused to organize segregated locals in the South. This is part of the history of these unions, and it would be wrong to misrepresent this story as you examine American Jewish/African American relations within the trade union movement.

Rather than go into a lengthy history of the work of the "historically Jewish unions," such as the ILGWU, the ACWA and others, to create positive relations between Jewish and African American workers and trade unionists, I strongly advise that you contact Gus Tyler, Assistant President of the ILGWU, who is an expert not only on the Jewish labor movement, but the general trade union movement of the United States. He can be reached at the

ILGWU  
1710 Broadway  
New York, NY 10019  
(212) 265-7000



Indeed, I have discussed your exhibition, "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," with Mr. Tyler, and he looks forward to discussing issues of relevance to this exhibit with you and/or your colleagues. (A colleague of ours in fact suggested--apparently over four years ago--that your researchers contact Mr. Tyler regarding African American/Jewish relations and the American labor movement, but this suggestion, and a number of others, has not yet been acted upon.)

Regarding the use of Herbert Hill as a basic resource in the issue of African American/American Jewish relations within the trade union movement, it is important to note that he was a bitter foe of the ILGWU, and it would be inappropriate to use his criticisms of the union without looking at the context of the relationship between him, the union, and its leading personalities. Gus Tyler can discuss the circumstances of the times with you, but I'm certain that you can see that many of the pronouncements, on all sides, regarding the African American/American Jewish/trade union interplay cannot be seen in isolation from the political and social atmosphere of the times. Indeed, the government investigations alluded to--if they were the investigations conducted by the late Congressman Adam Clayton Powell's office--would be extremely suspect. The congressman's attacks on the ILGWU, following the refusal of its president, David Dubinsky, to give him the Liberal Party's endorsement because of the accusations of corruption against Powell, are a matter of record.

In an examination of the encounter between African American and American Jewish workers in the American labor movement, we question why the statement that ". . . By 1946, 40% of the garment workers were Puerto Rican or Black women, but the top union remained mostly Jewish. . . ." (from the NEH/GO, page 30) is introduced at all. From the formation of the ILGWU until today, there have been many ethnic groups among its membership, yet only certain groups are included within the scope of your exhibition. As I mentioned above, the proportion of African American workers among the total membership of the ILGWU was probably never higher than 15 percent. It is likely that the proportion of Hispanic members is as great if not greater than African American workers in the ILGWU at the present time. And there were probably more Hispanic members--and by Hispanic, we mean all workers who either came themselves or whose forebears came from Spanish-speaking countries--than African American workers throughout most of

its history.

But looking at the statistic stating that 40 percent of the garment workers were Puerto Rican or Black women, and linking it with the statement that the top union management remained Jewish, reflects a political argument that pits certain ethnic groups against others, and uses statistics to buttress this argument. What, for instance, was the composition of the 60 percent who were not Puerto Rican or Black women? Is there any indication that the ILGWU, which you state worked tirelessly in the 1920s and 1930s to unionize Black workers, "[o]ut of both concern for African American workers and an interest in increasing their numbers," and which was ". . . at the time, a model for the nation. . . ." was anything less in 1946?

In any event, beyond numbers and statistics *per se*, I have a serious problem with the proposition that the leadership of a union should reflect--on the basis of their own ethnicity, or religion, or gender--the predominant ethnicity, or religion, or gender of the workforce, or even the union membership itself. The idea is abhorrent to me. People should rise as leaders within their union based on their skills as trade union activists, their ideas and their experience in their unions, and the confidence that their fellow trade unionists have in them as leaders who will represent their interests through the vehicle of their union.

There are currently six Jews on the AFL-CIO Executive Council who are presidents of major international unions. None of these people are presidents of a union with a plurality of Jewish members; most of their unions have very few Jewish members. Should they then be disqualified from being leaders of their unions?

Today, Local 23-25 of the ILGWU has a membership composed of approximately 85 percent American Chinese workers, 15 percent Hispanic, and between one and three percent African American workers. The local is led by an African American Vice President of the ILGWU. On a basis of ethnic complexion, he is not representative of the complexion of his members. Is it inappropriate for this individual to lead his local?

Beyond the issue of trade union leadership being "representative" of the ethnic/religious/gender character of a union's membership is the complex process of succession: that is, the process by which successive waves of "new" members that join unions rise within the ranks of the unions, become leaders on local levels, and then rise to national leadership within their respective unions. The issue of

the process of succession goes beyond the trade union movement. To focus on it simplistically in your exhibition, "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," would be doing a disservice to African Americans and American Jews who have worked within the labor movement to create a better society for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Page 29 of the NEH/GO describes a section entitled "African Americans and American Jews in the Communist Party," which "will describe why a disproportionate number of Jews were involved in the Communist Party and why some Blacks (sic) chose to belong as well. It will describe the philosophy of the Party during this period and the tensions between the two groups. The example of Black-Jewish interaction which will be highlighted here is the representation of the Scottsboro Boys by Samuel Liebowitz of the Communist-led International Labor Defense (ILD). . . ."

Two comments: First--the Jewish labor movement, and indeed American labor as a whole, was overwhelmingly associated with the socialist movement. This is also true of such related institutions as the United Hebrew Trades of New York State, the Workers' Defense League, the League for Industrial Democracy, the Jewish Socialist Federation(s), etc.

The antagonistic and competitive relationship between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, and their related trade unions, and the internecine struggles within the American labor movement in this connection, has to be considered in any discussion of American Jewish and African American participation within the CP, the SP, and the trade union movement.

Second--it appears from the NEH/GO that there were no moments of discord between African American and American Jewish members and/or leaders within the Communist Party; as the exhibit is focusing on the fact that some prominent Communists were American Jews, and others were African Americans, it would be both valuable and perhaps important to examine a) what if any conflicts arose between these two groups within the CP, as well as b) the relationships between prominent African American Communists, American Jewish Communists, and the larger African American and Jewish communities in which they lived.

In respect to the Oceanhill-Brownsville controversy, you have already received or will soon receive a letter from Fred Nauman, a member of the Jewish Labor Committee's Executive Committee and former Chairman of our Educators' Chapter. I concur with the



points made in his letter. The central issue upon which the entire Oceanhill-Brownsville issue revolved was due process.

Our organization has since its inception, worked within the mainstream of the American trade union movement, with most of its leadership coming from labor. Beginning in the mid-1940s, the JLC has been very involved in the struggle for civil rights for all Americans, regardless of race, religion or gender, and against prejudice and bigotry in society as a whole. The JLC was a pioneer through our organization of over two dozen labor committees to combat intolerance, throughout the country, which acted as local addresses for civil rights and anti-prejudice activism based within the trade union movement. We pioneered in the development of prejudice reduction and anti-discrimination workshops in unions of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and later the merged AFL-CIO. Indeed, many of our local, community-based activities became the basis of labor's support for the civil rights agenda in the mid-60s. Our local staff and lay leaders included American Jews and African Americans, and we worked in close alliance with such prominent individuals as A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and many individuals whose stories are less well known.

In light of our long history of work in the field, you can understand why we are concerned that the representation of the history of the interaction of Jews, African Americans and the American trade union movement be accurate, or at the minimum that your exhibit present a diversity of perspectives from which visitors--and subsequent users of the study guide, and participants in the proposed educators' symposium--can get a reasonable understanding of that history.

You can understand our concern, therefore, when after nearly three years of research, meetings, consultations and interviews, the Museum did not consult with any of our staff or lay leaders regarding the arena of the American trade union movement in relationship to the subject of your exhibition, or our concern when we learned that although Museum staff were invited to examine potentially valuable resources within our archives housed at the Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, these invitations were not acted upon. If section three of the exhibition, the "union hall," is to be a significant focus of "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," and there is no reason why it should not, we feel that we can, even at this late date, be of

assistance. I urge you to examine material prepared and disseminated through the trade union movement by the Jewish Labor Committee from the late 1940s through the 1960s, and to look at our extensive relationships with many of the major trade unions in which and through which the struggle to realize the vision of social justice, shared by African Americans and American Jews, was and continues to be waged.

This invitation to meet with your guest curator, Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, arts researcher Julie Reiss, and yourself still stands, and while I will take some time now to discuss specific issues raised in your NEH/GO, it would be more useful if we could meet at a mutually-agreeable time to discuss the issues raised above.

Sincerely,

**Martin Lapan**  
**Executive Director**

cc: Joan Rosenbaum, Axel Schupf

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**International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, AFL-CIO/CLC**  
**1710 Broadway**  
**New York, NY 10019**

**January 14, 1992**  
**Ms. Adina Back**  
**Exhibition Coordinator**  
**"Bridges and Boundaries"**  
**The Jewish Museum**  
**1864 Broadway, 4th floor**  
**New York, NY 10023**

**Dear Ms. Back:**

I am writing you in regard to the Jewish Museum's forthcoming exhibit "Bridges and Boundaries, African Americans and American Jews". Based on a four page description of the exhibit dated December 3rd, I agreed to join a committee of endorsers (in which my name was listed as "Charles Romney.") However, since then

## 58 - RACE TRAITOR

information has come to my attention regarding the content of the exhibit and I must therefore insist that you remove my name from any endorsement.

The exhibit, as described in a more detailed "narrative description," contains serious errors in its portrayal of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. It dredges up 30 year old unsubstantiated charges against the ILGWU which have no basis in fact and were, at the time, completely refuted. Specifically, you repeat a scurrilous charge by Herbert Hill that the ILGWU discriminated against Black and Puerto Rican members (page 31). This charge was refuted soon after it was made and thereafter retracted by the NAACP.

The narrative description of the exhibit also implies that the government and the NAACP investigated and revealed both sex and race discrimination, once again without providing any substance for this charge (page 30). Nothing of the kind took place. As mentioned above the accusations of Herbert Hill, made when he was employed by the NAACP, were untrue and were retracted as such by the NAACP. Regarding any government investigation, if this reference is to the charge made by then Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, you should know that this charge was, in fact, disproved in hearings and led to the Union's complete vindication. Furthermore, it is part of the historical record that Powell resented the ILGWU for not endorsing him and that his charges must be seen in this light.

When I agreed to endorse the exhibit I had no idea it would include, as unchallenged fact, unsubstantiated, discredited attacks which were refuted 30 years ago. I find these misrepresentations particularly outrageous as I personally lived through the history which the exhibit attempts to describe, having first joined the ILGWU as a rank and file worker in 1962.

The ILGWU has fought against racism and discrimination throughout its entire history. The Union that fought segregation in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, today is a leader in the fight for the rights of minority workers including African Americans, Haitians, Hispanics and Asian-Americans. The ILGWU has benefited hundreds of thousands of minority workers, both through representing our members at the workplace and by advancing their cause in the broader social arena. Yet this experience of unity and support, shared by hundreds of thousands, is obliterated in the exhibit by the politically motivated, long discredited attacks of a few



individuals. I find it hard to believe that such an approach is considered good history. Why not look at the ILGWU's history from the bottom up, by interviewing retired and current members who lived through it, instead of relying on two or three isolated unsupported attacks?

I understand that Marty Lapan, Executive Director of the Jewish Labor Committee, and David Melman, assistant to Jay Mazur, President of the ILGWU, have spoken to you and that you expressed some willingness to address our concerns, including meeting with us. However, until this matter is cleared up I cannot allow my name to be associated with your exhibit.

Cordially,

**Edgar Romney**  
**Executive Vice President**

c: Mayor David Dinkins  
Hazel Dukes, President, NAACP  
Victor Gotbaum, Director, The Center for Labor Management  
& Policy Studies  
Dr. Benjamin Hooks, CEO/Executive Director, NAACP  
Marty Lapan, Executive Directory, Jewish Labor Committee  
Morris Offit, President, The Jewish Museum  
Congressman Charles B. Rangel  
Dennis Rivera, President, Local 1199, Health and Hosptial  
Workers Union  
Joan Rosenbaum, Executive Director, The Jewish Museum

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**Industrial Relations Research Institute**  
**University of Wisconsin - Madison**  
**4226 Social Science Building**  
**1180 Observatory Drive**  
**Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1393**

60 - RACE TRAITOR

**Ms. Adina Back**  
**Exhibition Coordinator**  
**"Bridges and Boundaries"**  
**The Jewish Museum**  
**1865 Broadway, 4th Floor**  
**New York, NY 10023**  
**February 4, 1992**

**Dear Ms. Back,**

Our mutual friend, Henry Schwarzschild, suggested that I send you comments on the letters received from the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union and the Jewish Labor Committee regarding the forthcoming exhibition, "Bridges and Boundaries." As you may know, for more than two decades I was National Labor Secretary of the NAACP and I closely observed and at certain times intervened in the racial practices of the ILGWU and the garment manufacturing industry.

The letter from the ILGWU refers to "a scurrilous charge by Herbert Hill that the ILGWU discriminated against Black and Puerto Rican members. This charge was refuted soon after it was made and was thereafter retracted by the NAACP." The statement is a complete falsification of the record as the charge was never "refuted" nor was it "retracted" by the Association.

The NAACP could not have "retracted" its charges against the ILGWU given the fact that the New York State Commission for Human Rights, in *Holmes v. Falikman*<sup>1</sup> sustained the Association's position on the issues that had caused the NAACP initially to take action on behalf of its member, Ernest Holmes. Following an eight-month investigation, a finding of "probable cause to credit the allegations of the complaint" was issued by the investigating commissioner. The union had not complied with an order of the State Commission, and the agency noted the "failure of the representatives of the local to cooperate in the investigation."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Holmes v. Falikman*, C-7580-61, New York State Commission for Human Rights (1963)

<sup>2</sup> Commissioner Rupert Ruiz, New York State Commission for Human Rights, to Emil Schlesinger, attorney for Local 10, ILGWU, September 14, 1952. (*Holmes v. Falikman*, File 1963, New York State Commission for Human Rights. Copy in writer's files.)

*The New York Herald Tribune*, in a front page report headlined "ILGWU Condemned For Racial Barriers," summarized the findings of the State Commission with the comment that "the New York Cutters Local of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union was judged guilty of racial discrimination in a report released yesterday by the State Commission For Human Rights." The news report noted that wages for members of Local 10 "are roughly double that of other workers in the industry."<sup>3</sup>

After additional hearings and protracted negotiations, on May 17, 1963, twenty-five months after the original complaint was filed in *Holmes v. Falikman*, the ILGWU entered into a consent agreement to comply with the law.<sup>4</sup> In the settlement obtained by the Commission, the union agreed to admit Holmes into the Cutters local of the ILGWU, to place him in a job and to make it possible for him to gain experience as a skilled cutter. This is precisely what the State Commission had ordered the ILGWU to do in its original finding a year before. *The New York Times*, in a report headlined "Union Told to Get Job for Negro," stated: "A garment cutters union has been ordered by the State Commission for Human Rights to arrange for employment of a Negro at union rates commensurate with his skill and to admit the Negro into union membership..."<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to the Union's assertion that the charges were "retracted" by the NAACP, both the Association's national headquarters and the New York State Conference of NAACP Branches hailed the action of the state commission, and in their press releases called upon the ILGWU to comply with federal and state anti-discrimination laws. Roy Wilkins, the Association's executive

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<sup>3</sup> Joel Seldin, "ILGWU Condemned for Racial Barriers," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1962, p.1; see also Fred Ferretti, "Crusading Negro Finds Road is Rough," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1962, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Stipulation and Order on the Complaints of Ernest Holmes v. Moe Falikman et al., Case No. C-7580-61, May 17, 1963. (*Holmes v. Falikman*, File 1963, New York State Commission for Human Rights. Copy in writer's files.)

<sup>5</sup> "Union Told to Get Job for Negro," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1962, p. 22.



## 62 - RACE TRAITOR

secretary, in a letter to the Jewish Labor Committee had reaffirmed the position of the NAACP, declaring that "we do not feel that the general denials and outraged protests which have been the response of the ILGWU to our charges of discriminatory practices are in any way an adequate answer to those charges."<sup>6</sup>

On October 8, 1962, the NAACP board of directors adopted a resolution on the ILGWU to the effect that the union

has made no adequate answer to our charges: that Negro and Puerto Rican workers are concentrated in the lowest paying jobs.... That non-white workers are for the most part barred from entry into those ILGWU locals which control the well-paid stable jobs; that Negroes are not admitted into various informal and formal job training programs where entry is controlled by the union.... Our members and the non-white community are shocked by the union leadership's repeated statement that 'Negroes and Puerto Ricans are not ready for positions of leadership in the union.' This pious hypocrisy is an all-too familiar refrain and is no more acceptable coming from the mouth of a 'liberal' union leader than from an avowed racist in the deep South.<sup>7</sup>

The board resolution concluded with the statement that "the NAACP calls upon its members who are members of the ILGWU to assert their rights within the union. The Association will actively assist all garment workers in pressing for equality of opportunity within the ILGWU and within the industry."<sup>8</sup>

The ILGWU was vulnerable to the NAACP's charges and was embarrassed by the widespread public attention given to the findings of the New York State Commission For Human Rights. Thus Will Chasen of the ILGWU staff, in an internal memorandum referring to a letter from Herbert Hill, labor secretary of the

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Emanuel Muravchik, executive secretary, Jewish Labor Committee, from Roy Wilkins, executive secretary, NAACP, October 31, 1962. (NAACP documentation in the NAACP Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Copy in writer's files.)

<sup>7</sup> Resolution on the International Ladies Garment Workers Union by NAACP Board of Directors, October 8, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

NAACP to the American Jewish Committee, acknowledged: "The awful thing about Hill's letter is that, on the whole, it is probably an accurate summary, and it exposes the awful idiocy of the way this situation was handled."<sup>9</sup>

The union's reaction to the public exposure of their racial practices was to engage in repeated evasion and distortion, as when Moe Falikman, manager of Local 10, in response to the charges filed with the state civil rights agency, told *The New York Times* (May 18, 1961, p.27) that there were "more than 500 Negroes and Puerto Ricans" among membership of the cutters local. Later the ILGWU said that there were four hundred non-white members in this craft local, but subsequently the figure was reduced to three hundred and then to two hundred by representatives of the union. The commission repeatedly challenged the ILGWU to produce names and addresses and places of employment of these alledged members, and the NAACP said it would withdraw the complaint if the union would comply, but such identification was never produced.

Individual officers of the union played their own "numbers game." For example, Gus Tyler, assistant president of the ILGWU wrote that "In Local 10, there are 199 known Negro and Spanish-speaking members."<sup>10</sup> Tyler explained that his figure included "Cubans, Panamanians, Colombians, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, etc., as well as Puerto Ricans."<sup>11</sup> But later Tyler said that "We had 275 black members in that local."<sup>12</sup> According to a tract distributed by the ILGWU, however, there were "250 Negro

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<sup>9</sup> Will Chasen to Charles S. Zimmerman, manager of the New York Joint Board of the ILGWU, October 23, 1962. (Box 26, File 8, Zimmerman Collection, ILGWU Archives, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.)

<sup>10</sup> Gus Tyler, "The Truth About the ILGWU," *New Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gus Tyler, "The Intellectual and the ILGWU," in *Creators and Disturbers, Reminiscences by Jewish Intellectuals of New York*, Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein, eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 173

## 64 - RACE TRAITOR

and Spanish-speaking cutters in Local 10."<sup>13</sup> The evident disparity in these numbers and their apparently arbitrary nature needs no further comment.

The publicity surrounding the *Holmes* case provoked a congressional investigation of the ILGWU's racial and other practices. The official record directly contradicts the Union's claim of "complete vindication," since quite clearly the Union was not exonerated.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the testimony at the congressional hearings was damaging to the ILGWU. Mrs. Florence Rice, for example, a black woman who was a member of ILGWU Local 155, testified that she was warned by a union official that she would never work again in the garment industry if she gave testimony before the congressional committee. She told the committee that "workers have been intimidated by union officials with threats of losing their jobs if they so much as appear at the hearing."<sup>15</sup> Soon after her testimony before the committee in open hearings she was dismissed from her job and was not able to obtain employment thereafter as a garment worker. Mrs. Rice later became director of the Harlem Consumer Council and a community activist. (For the writer's testimony before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Investigation of the Garment Industry of the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives, see *Congressional Record-House*, January 31, 1963, pp. 1496-99.)

Documentation in congressional files, together with interviews by the writer with congressional staff members reveal that the ILGWU used its considerable political influence at the highest levels of government to stop the hearings. An announcement was made at the last session on September 21, 1962, that the hearings were

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<sup>13</sup> Harry Fleishman, "Is the ILGWU Biased"? The National Labor Service of the American Jewish Committee, New York (November 1962).

<sup>14</sup> *Hearings* before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Investigation of The Garment Industry of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 87th Congress, 2nd Session. Hearings held in N.Y. August 17, 18, 23 and 24; Washington, D.C., September 21, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167. (Testimony of Mrs. Florence Rice.)



"recessed, to reconvene subject to call," but they were never reconvened. After the union succeeded in making certain political arrangements, the congressional committee abandoned the hearings which were never formally concluded. The assertion in the letter from the ILGWU that the charges were "disproved in hearings and led to the union's complete vindication," is simply not true.

The statement in the ILGWU's letter that Adam Clayton Powell, Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, initiated the investigation because "Powell resented the ILGWU for not endorsing him," is utter nonsense. Powell's political career lasted almost thirty years and he repeatedly received huge pluralities from his Harlem district. In 1968, for example, Powell easily swept his district, taking 80.6 percent of the vote. The political influence of the ILGWU and the Liberal Party in Powell's Harlem district was negligible, if indeed it existed at all, and it is unlikely that Powell ever requested a political endorsement from the Union, since he did not need it. This is one more example of distortion by the ILGWU in their efforts to divert attention away from their own racial practices.

In response to the NAACP's criticism, the ILGWU found it necessary to make some changes regarding its racial practices. In the entire history of the ILGWU (founded in 1900) there had never been a non-Caucasian on the General Executive Board or in any leadership position in the international union. Although by the 1960's a majority of workers in the central membership base of the ILGWU in New York City were black and Hispanic, the union leadership consisted entirely of whites. After the *Holmes* case a black woman and a Puerto Rican male were placed on the General Executive Board of the union. The ILGWU was also vulnerable to the Association's charge that its restrictive requirements for union office and its undemocratic election procedures prevented black and Hispanic members from achieving leadership positions, and in direct response to NAACP criticism made changes that eliminated at least some of the most egregious violations of union democracy.

One of the consequences of the widespread public attention given to the NAACP's exposure of the ILGWU's racial practices was the cancellation by the union of its support for a home for the aged built with union funds and annually subsidized by the ILGWU but from which black union members were excluded. The ILGWU wing of the Workmens Circle Home in the Bronx for retired union members was built with union funds in the amount of \$1,300,000.

After the ILGWU wing was dedicated on June 11, 1961, the union continued to make substantial financial contributions to its operation while fully aware that non-white members were not admitted, as black workers had repeatedly protested the use of union funds to build and maintain a facility closed to them. After the NAACP activity, the ILGWU cancelled its agreement with the Workmens Circle Home.<sup>16</sup> In addition, again as a result of the Association's efforts, black and Hispanic workers were moved into better paying and more skilled jobs within the industry for the first time and some were employed in hitherto "lily-white" staff positions within the union.

However new conflicts later emerged between the ILGWU and non-white workers, including the issue of union financing of a segregated housing project. Black, Hispanic and Asian-American members of the ILGWU demonstrated at the headquarters building of the international union to protest the exclusion of non-white members from the ILGWU financed East River Houses. One union member, Margarita Lopez, was quoted in the *New York Daily News* as saying,

How could this happen? How could this happen in a union that is supposed to be so liberal. The blacks, the Hispanics, the Chinese are the workers. The dues come from these people, but the housing is all white and middle class. These were union pension funds. They give union funds but union workers who are black and Hispanic and Chinese cannot live in those houses.<sup>17</sup>

After a group of non-white workers filed a lawsuit, Federal Judge Robert L. Carter found that there was indeed a pattern of

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<sup>16</sup> See Report of the General Executive Board to the Thirty-Third Convention, ILGWU, Miami Beach, May 12, 1965, p. 57; see also June 1, 1961 issue of *Justice*, with page 1 headline reading "ILG Wing of Circle Home Opening June 11."

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Earl Caldwell, "When A House Can't Be Your Home," *Daily News* (New York), June 1, 1983, p. 4.

unlawful racial exclusion in the ILGWU East River Houses.<sup>18</sup> Documentation introduced into the court record revealed that the ILGWU had contributed more than \$20 million of union funds to subsidize a housing project for middle-class whites who were not ILGWU members, adjacent to a vast area of substandard housing inhabited mainly by racial minorities. This was to become a major issue among non-white ILGWU members in the New York area and several thousand workers signed petitions demanding an end to the racist pattern in the union's East River Houses, also known as ILGWU Cooperative Village.<sup>19</sup>

After Title VII, the employment section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, went into effect, the NAACP responded to requests for assistance from black and Hispanic workers who filed charges against the ILGWU with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and in the federal courts. Charges of race and sex discrimination were sustained in cases against both the international and local unions, as in the *Putterman* case, where a federal court in New York found "willful and intentional" violations of the law by both a local and the international union.<sup>20</sup> Among the many EEOC charges filed against the ILGWU were cases in Chicago,

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<sup>18</sup> *Julio Huertas et al., v. East River Housing Corp. et al.*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, 77 CIV. 4494 (RLC).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Frederick Seiden and Frances Goldin of the East Side Joint Planning Council and examination of files, March 24-26, 1983. Sources that document the ILGWU's role in financing the \$20,000,000 ILGWU Co-Operative Village" are Max D. Danish, *The World of David Dubinsky* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957, pp. 305-307), *David Dubinsky: A Life of Labor*, David Dubinsky with A.H. Raskin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977, pp. 216-218), *Justice*, May 1, 1952, p. 1. See also Report of the General Executive Board to the Thirty-Third Convention, ILGWU, Miami Beach, May 12, 1965, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Violetta Putterman v. Knitgoods Workers Union Local 55 of ILGWU, and International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Sol Greene and Sol C. Chaiken*, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 78 Civ. 6000 (MJL), August 20, 1983.



Philadelphia, Cleveland, Atlanta, New York and other cities.<sup>21</sup> A further example of the NAACP's continuing interest in these matters was the legal assistance provided in 1971 to a black and Hispanic caucus known as the Rank and File Committee. This activity resulted in the intervention of the U.S Department of Labor in the election proceedings within Local 155 of the ILGWU.<sup>22</sup>

The rapidly accelerating transformation of the ethnic and racial composition of the garment industry labor force in the 1940s and 50s caused serious problems for the leaders of the ILGWU because the traditional white leadership was unwilling to accept blacks and Puerto Ricans as equal partners in an interracial union, to share control of the organization with non-whites and to permit them to share in the power that derived from such institutional authority. Instead of honestly confronting these issues, the union leadership attempted to maintain the racial status quo which came under increasing attack, and in an effort to divert attention from the central issue of racial discrimination, conducted an extensive public relations campaign characterized by prevarication and distortion in an effort to make anti-Semitism the issue, and to discredit their critics.

Respect for the historical record demands that the reporting and interpretation of events be supported by corroborative evidence. The self-serving distortions of an interested party in a conflict cannot be accepted especially when their statements are easily refuted by documented fact. The communications from the ILGWU and

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<sup>21</sup> A sample of the charges against the ILGWU filed with the EEOC include the following New York charges: TNY9-0648; TNY1-1413; 2-1463; 9-0059 and 1754. In charge YNK3-063, the International itself was a respondent. The charges filed against the ILGWU included Chicago (TCH8-0277); Kansas City (TKC1-1101); Memphis (TME1-1091); San Francisco (TSF-0853); Baltimore (TBA3-0084); Philadelphia (TPA2-0615); Cleveland (TCT2-0468, 2-0043, 1-0002, 1-0004, 1-0006, 1-0008, 1-00010); and Birmingham (TB10-0954, 1-0357, 1-0915, 1-0873, 9-0098, 2-0875).

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of this case and related issues involving the practices of the ILGWU after *Holmes v. Falikman*, see Herbert Hill, "Black Labor and Affirmative Action: An Historical Perspective," in *The Question of Discrimination: Racial Inequality in the U.S. Labor Market*, Steven Shulman and William Darity, eds., Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989, pp. 217-232.

the Jewish Labor Committee contain many falsehoods and distortions and at your request I am prepared to respond to other issues raised in both letters.

Enclosed is some material which I trust you will find useful and I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me for any assistance I can render to the Jewish Museum.

Sincerely,

**Herbert Hill, Professor of Industrial Relations and  
Professor of Afro-American Studies**

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**The Jewish Museum  
1865 Broadway, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10023**

**February 23, 1992  
Professor Herbert Hill  
Industrial Relations Research Institute  
4225 Humanities Building  
University of Wisconsin - Madison  
Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1393**

**Dear Professor Hill:**

My apologies for not responding to your letter of February 4th sooner. We have been very busy preparing for the March 22nd opening of the exhibition, "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews."

Thank you for taking the time to prepare your well-documented and lengthy response to the letter that we received from the JLC and the ILGWU. The information and evidence that you included is important confirmation of the research that we have conducted over the past several years. I have circulated your letter, articles, and newspaper clippings to the other members of the curatorial team including, Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, the exhibition guest curator, and her research associate Beth Klopott, as well as to our mutual friend, Jon Bloom.

We have also had lengthy conversations with Mildred Rox-

## 70 - RACE TRAITOR

borough and George Carter of the NAACP regarding this matter. Mrs. Roxborough essentially agreed with your position that the NAACP never retracted the charges. As she said, how could they retract charges that were based in evidence. However, she was concerned that we also know that ultimately Roy Wilkins made peace and found common ground with the ILGWU leadership.

I have included for your information, an article that Moe Foner from 1199 sent to me from the AARP newsletter that refers to former ILGWU member Florence Rice. I have enclosed an article that the ILGWU recommended we read. It appeared in the journal *Labor History* and on page 315 states that "the NAACP retraced Hill's accusations against the ILGWU...."

As I am sure you can appreciate, one of our biggest challenges in creating this exhibition has been to convey the idea that history is about interpretation, construction and perception. One of your goals in recounting this complex, and sometimes painful history, is to allow different perspectives to emerge.

Again, many thanks for your useful letter. Jon Bloom mentioned to me that you are planning to be in New York City in the spring. If your time permits, I hope that you will have an opportunity to see the exhibition. I would be delighted to take you through it.

Sincerely,

**Adina Back, Exhibition Coordinator**

cc: Henry Schwarzschild, Jon Bloom

\*\*\*\*\*

**Industrial Relations Research Institute  
University of Wisconsin - Madison  
4226 Social Science Building  
1180 Observatory Drive  
Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1393**

**Ms. Adina Back  
Exhibition Coordinator  
"Bridges and Boundaries"  
The Jewish Museum  
1865 Broadway, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10023  
March 2, 1992**



Dear Ms. Back,

I am pleased that you and your colleagues found the material I sent regarding the ILGWU useful. You mention that the ILGWU submitted Peter Levy's article from *Labor History* which claims that "the NAACP retracted Hill's accusations against the ILGWU..." The union neglected, however, to inform you that soon after Levy's article appeared, *Labor History* published my refutation of his statement (copy enclosed) [omitted here - editors]. It is of some interest that Levy failed to respond to my communication, although the journal offered him the opportunity to do so.

Peter Levy gives as the sole source of his misleading statement an assertion made by the ILGWU in a union publication. He provides no supporting evidence and simply repeats this unsupported assertion as fact. In my letter to *Labor History* I stated that "The uncritical repetition of the self-serving statement of one interested party in a conflict is not enough, especially when these statements are easily refuted by documented fact."

I very much regret that my teaching obligations at the University of Wisconsin prevent me from accepting your kind invitation to the preview and reception for "Bridges and Boundaries." I expect however to be in New York later this year and hope to take advantage of your kind offer to take me through the exhibition at that time.

Sincerely,

Herbert Hill, Professor of Industrial Relations and  
Professor of Afro-American Studies

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*Editors' note. The following letter appeared in the New York Times of May 9, 1992.*

New York Times  
April 23, 1992

To the Editor:

Your article about criticism of "Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews," an exhibition of the Jewish Museum in New York City (arts pages, April 20), states that labor unions

## 72 - RACE TRAITOR

have objected to material in the show. You report that museum officials removed references to past discriminatory racial practices of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in response to objections from the union, which characterized the material as "30-year-old discredited charges by an official of the N.A.A.C.P."

As labor secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the time, I was the official of the N.A.A.C.P. who filed the charges against the I.L.G.W.U. with the New York State Commission for Human Rights on behalf of an association member. Contrary to the union assertion that the charges were discredited, the commission confirmed our position and found the union guilty of racial discrimination in violation of the state civil rights law.

As you reported July 2, 1962, the commission found in the case of *Holmes v. Falikman*, that Local 10, the cutters' local of the I.L.G.W.U. was responsible for discriminatory acts. In the words of the commission: "the evidence raises serious doubt as to its good faith to comply with the State Law Against Discrimination."

You stated the "the union was told that the commission would maintain a continuing interest in its training and admissions practices and that these would be reviewed periodically to assure that the terms of the decision would be fully and conscientiously carried out."

The N.A.A.C.P. in a press release dated June 2, 1962, hailed the order of the state commission, noting that black and Puerto Rican members of the garment workers' union were discriminated against in wages and other conditions of employment and in status as members of the union. The record makes it clear that after an extensive investigation, the state commission fully sustained the charges made by the N.A.A.C.P. and that the I.L.G.W.U. has repeatedly falsified the history of these events.

It is deplorable that the Jewish Museum has compromised the integrity of its exhibition by permitting organizations engaged in self-serving distortions of history to determine what material may or may not be shown.

**Herbert Hill**

**Professor of Afro-American Studies  
University of Wisconsin, Madison**

# Reading, 'riting, and race

John Garvey

The underlying assumption of most educational policy is that the jobs young people get are largely determined by the training and skills they have acquired in school. Since education programs are, for the moment at least, intended to be benevolent, this common sense leads to the quick acceptance of the idea that it is reasonable, if not absolutely necessary, for resources to be devoted to promoting the benefits of good work habits and the like. I would argue that in fact young people's work fortunes are largely determined by a series of collective arrangements and have little to do with individual abilities or inadequacies. Moreover, I would argue that the skills which individuals obtain through schooling make little or no difference in their ability to perform tasks at work. (Rogoff & Lave)

In the absence of all that much good education, however, schools and other education programs (such as adult literacy programs, high school equivalency programs and occupational training programs) provide a mechanism to rationalize and legitimate the sorting out of people for good and bad jobs. As a result, young people who are perhaps not yet quite resigned to their position in the society are encouraged to interpret that position as a justified state of affairs. This result is, in large measure, accomplished through the use of tests which purport to document the skills of individuals and to document further that skills improve very slowly, if at all. If individuals make precious little progress, then they must be performing at their natural level and it follows that the work they are able to obtain is the work they are qualified for. Sixth-grade level readers get sixth-grade level jobs.

This argument for the actual role of schools has been eloquently made by Frances Piven and Richard Cloward in a

*John Garvey is one of the editors of Race Traitor.*



discussion of the peculiar contribution of American schooling to social control:

... the point is that the conjunction of a universal common school system that advertised "no distinction of rich and poor" with highly stigmatized arrangements to impose just such distinctions was a structural arrangement that had the effect of legitimating differential socio-economic status by attributing it to qualities of the individual. If all children were given an opportunity for achievement, and needed only to demonstrate "talent and industry and good conduct," it followed that those who failed, even when large proportions of the children from particular groups failed, had only themselves to blame. One system had embraced all and embraced all equally. Some succeeded, others did not, and not because of the economic and political realities of a class society, but because some possessed personal qualities of talent and industry which others lacked. The structural arrangements of the schools implied a doctrine, in other words, about the causes of the economic hardships that people suffered, and what could be done about them. The causes were in individual characteristics, and the solution was in individual striving to demonstrate talent and good conduct. And if such strivings failed, why then there was no one to blame but oneself. (Piven & Cloward)

An understanding of the significance of those arrangements must be situated in a recognition of the complex interplay between the descendants of slaves and others considered non-white and those understood to be white.

In partial recognition of the significance of race, the educational policy discussion in the United States sometimes, in the work of those who couch their concerns about skill deficits in a demographic analysis, takes a twist that emphasizes the "newness" of the situation we will be encountering - a much greater percentage of the workers of the future will have dark skins and will speak a first language other

than English. I find this twist to be troubling. The whole conception of something new happening assumes a biological/cultural identity among "white" Americans which sets them off from the "newcomers" and assumes that those "white" Americans are the rightful owners of this country's past, present and future.

The assumption is present even among those who argue, from the best of intentions, that the changing demographics make possible improvements in the conditions of those oppressed because of their skin color or nationality. Some suggest that the coincidence of economic exigency and a changed demography makes shifts in the racial allocation of workplace assignments both necessary and possible. This perspective was straightforwardly elaborated in a policy paper issued by New York City's Department of Employment several years ago:

The coming decade presents unparalleled employment opportunities for disadvantaged persons. The opportunities arise from a declining cohort of young people to fill entry-level jobs in a variety of skilled occupations, thus opening a key part of the labor market to persons who in the past have been left behind in the competition for such jobs - low income minorities (especially young people), women, new immigrants, and certain other groups. These new opportunities are meaningless, however, if those whom they would most logically benefit lack the literacy skills to take advantage of them. (New York City Department of Employment)

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot captured the essence of this line of thought:

There is the realistic perception that blacks, especially poor blacks, have for generations been disfranchised, powerless, and excluded from society's resources and bounty. The experience of exclusion and oppression has led some to fight for their meager share of the American

pie, but has led many more to withdraw from the race, to assume that it is rigged and refuse to run. The new ideology. . . conveys a double message and conflicting imagery. It says that blacks have been treated unfairly, but that the system is basically fair. To overcome the profound injustices,. . . students need to learn how to successfully negotiate the system, must refuse to become discouraged by the barriers they will face, and must become exemplary models of discipline and civility. (Lightfoot)

Furthermore, the perspective advanced in the Department of Employment report neglects the increasingly large gap between entry-level jobs and the rest of the job ladder. Entry-level jobs do not usually lead to higher level jobs. The days of beginning as a bank teller and rising to become branch manager are long gone. What is more likely is that, in an industry such as banking, if you enter as a teller, you will leave as a teller. It's not all that attractive - even to people who are without work. (Hull)

## **The Black Experience**

Analysts such as Samuel Ehrenhalt of the United States' Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics in New York City have contended that the low labor market participation rate among young black men is the consequence of the unpreparedness of the city's minority populations. I believe that his position is mistaken. I would suggest that the low labor participation rate can be more profitably understood as the consequence of the decision on the part of many of the city's non-white young people to remain out of work rather than to adapt themselves to the requirements and working conditions of the jobs they are able to get - "to withdraw from the race" in Lightfoot's phrase.

The great difficulty with advancing my position is that I can cite no leaflets issued by organizations of young blacks urging their peers to stay home; I know of no organizations



that have attempted to do so. How it is that young people have communicated these values to each other and how they have enforced them are subjects for research not yet being done.

While the statistics documenting job segregation might not be known to many, the everyday consequences for the getting and keeping of jobs are known by most job-seekers. In a metropolitan labor market such as New York City, this can explain why it is that young blacks, on average, complete more years of formal education than their white or Latino working class counterparts. (Sullivan) They realize that their most significant opportunities for secure, stable employment reside in the civil service or quasi-civil service spheres and that jobs in those sectors require either specific educational credentials or the successful passing of particular tests.

It can also explain, as I hope to show, why young blacks stay out of the regular labor market and stay out of schooling. I realize that I appear to be contradicting myself. Do they stay in school or do they not stay in school? The answer is **both**. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that both responses are perfectly reasonable ones. Which one a particular young person chooses will, undoubtedly, be influenced by parents, other relatives, friends and perhaps, teachers.

John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham have argued that young blacks disinvest from school because of their perception that schooling will make no difference in changing the job ceilings set for them in local labor markets. (Ogbu; Fordham) This analysis has been echoed by Susan Anderson, who has suggested that the dropout rate among black adolescents represents more the effectiveness of a collective boycott of the schools than individual resignation to academic failure. (Anderson) This is a remarkable development in the history of the black communities of this country, for, as is well known, those communities have usually made every effort to gain for their children an opportunity to become educated. (Holt)

Down through the centuries, the black community has

maintained its beliefs in the possibility of freedom. Its traditional culture has been sustained by an extraordinary eloquence of language - a language deeply textured with scholarship and learning. Within that context, black folks have paid great attention to learning to read and write. We can recall the persistence of Frederick Douglass as he went about the business of learning to read and write by making friends with white children in Baltimore and having them help him read. (Douglass) Or we can recall, more recently, the extraordinary diligence of the incarcerated Malcolm X to become a reader. In both cases, we witness the achievement of the autodidact and we might be tempted to discount its significance - but we will do so only if we forget that, for more years than not, blacks were either forbidden to learn to read or were placed in schools that expected little of them. In seventh grade, the then Malcolm Little expressed a desire to become a lawyer. But he was advised by a friendly teacher:

'Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer - that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You're good with your hands - making things. Everybody admires your shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person - you'd get all kinds of work.' (Haley)

With some notable exceptions, the experience of blacks in American schools has not been a happy one. At the same time, though, black parents persist in sending their children off to school; they urge that the schools be stricter, that they assign more homework, that they produce higher scores on tests. The developments that Ogbu and Fordham chronicle go against the grain not only of much of black folks' history in this country but, as well, against the grain of what most black folks still say. The discrepancy cries out for explana-

tion. Black folks, quintessential Americans that they are, most clearly illuminate the contradictory impulses shaping all our lives.

In short, I would suggest that black workers and would-be workers make choices concerning their participation in the workforce and in schooling on the basis of what such participation might yield. These choices may not always be wise ones and they may reflect a very circumscribed sense of what is possible or desirable, but they are sensible enough. Nonetheless, these choices are often portrayed by social scientists and social policy makers as evidence of various pathologies located either in family or community structures. I would like to suggest that we interpret people's activity as simultaneously evidencing both rebellion against and accommodation to their circumstances. I do not mean that there are some who rebel and others who accommodate; rather, most young people do both in distinctive, if not idiosyncratic combinations. As a rule they do not do so self-consciously and their verbalizations do not necessarily reflect accurately what they are doing. Thus, interviews and questionnaires, let alone aggregate statistics, reveal little of the complexity of their motives or of the range of their possible next steps.

I do not think the basis of decision-making is a narrowly calculating one. I think it is suffused with an ethic of quasi-political non-collaboration which has its roots in the defeat of the last great upsurge of black folks in the 1950's and 1960's. Although the victories of the period usually receive the most attention, the extent of the defeat must be acknowledged as well. The most eloquent leaders of the black movement were murdered and its most provocative political organizations were destroyed - at least partially with government support. Coming soon after the political defeat, yet another assault was launched on the jobs of black workers. Whereas in the nineteenth century the displacement of black labor had occurred due to the aggressive actions of immigrant workers, the displacement of the late twentieth occurred through the transfer of the jobs they held outside the major cities to rural areas or to other countries.



## 80 - RACE TRAITOR

In this last period of time, it became apparent that the elimination of *de jure* discrimination would not eliminate the segmentation or "ghettoization" of the labor market. Many researchers have documented the persistence of a racially stratified labor market. Walter Stafford of the Community Service Society in New York City found that 68% of all blacks work in only 20 of the city's 212 industries - mainly hospitals, banks, insurance companies, telephone communications, and department stores. At the same time, blacks have almost no representation in 130 out of almost 200 industries in the city's private sector. When blacks are represented in "core industries," they typically occupy clerical positions. (Stafford) Norman Fainstein has summarized the situation:

. . . the economic situation of blacks is rooted more in the character of the employment opportunities in growing industries than in the disappearance of 'entry-level' jobs in declining industries. Unlike the immigrants of yesterday, the problem for blacks is not so much inadequate educations as the channeling of the educated into relatively poor jobs and the exclusion of the uneducated from work altogether. (Fainstein)

What do black workers and would-be workers do upon encountering this labor market? Ogbu has suggested that many of those in school decide that school success is not worth the effort. I would suggest that, upon leaving school, many decide that it is better not to participate in the labor market - better "to withdraw from the race." They instead survive, more or less, by working at off-the-books jobs, relying on public assistance and/or criminal activity. This pattern is not new - it was described in great detail by Malcolm X more than twenty years ago. But its significance has not been fully appreciated.

## The White Experience

But, what about white students and young workers? What has been happening to them and what have they been doing? Real wages have declined for all young workers. And, to make matters worse, most schools that white children and teenagers attend are boring, mind-numbing places. Many young white people have not been especially inclined to spend a great deal of time or effort on school work since they too know it will not really make all that much difference. The educational critic, Ira Shor, has interpreted the decline of scores on the SAT and other measures as the consequence of a prolonged sit-down strike in the schools. (Shor) Perhaps, then, a difference between young whites and young blacks is the tactic of struggle. Blacks boycott and whites sit down.

Nonetheless, white teenagers leaving school have continued to have access to better jobs than their black counterparts. Preferred access for whites begins while they are still in school; more white than black teenagers work while they go to school. (*From School to Work*) This is not so surprising since, in a place like New York City, the great employers of teenagers are neighborhood shops, restaurants, and supermarkets. Anyone familiar with the city will know that many of the city's black neighborhoods have very few of those types of establishments and the ones that are there are not owned by blacks. As a result, the opportunities for a somewhat customary filling of jobs by neighborhood kids do not exist as often as they do in the white neighborhoods.

The preferential access continues into the job market proper. Knowledge of job openings still travels very much along family circuits. In this country, unlike much of western Europe, young people are pretty much left to themselves in sorting out their possibilities. As a result, they rely primarily on friends and relatives for information about employment opportunities and the relative merits and drawbacks of various jobs. Parents, aunts and uncles, and older brothers and sisters keep their eyes and ears open and make sure to alert the young job seeker of the possibility of work and the

expectations, usually unwritten, of the hiring office. Not so surprisingly, these networks reinforce existing patterns of stratified labor markets.

On top of that, it has been documented that at least some of the city's employment agencies routinely steer white clients to better job interviews.

In spite of these advantages, young whites have not been all that happy lately. Since there has been little enough evidence of a popular rebellion along the lines of what happened during the 1960's, and the left-wing organizations have, for the most part, decided that it is not possible to speak to whites about race, the most rebellious of the young whites have often wound up being attracted by the Nazis and the Klan. According to reports from Louisiana, for example, David Duke's support has always been strongest among young white working-class men.

The estrangement of white students from the schools has, I believe, given rise to many of the most significant educational reform initiatives. Specifically, a report issued by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce and published by the National Center on Education and the Economy in Rochester, New York, entitled "America's Choice: high wages or low skills!" is inspired, in part, by the effort of the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party to bring back white workers. (*America's Choice*) Hilary Clinton serves on the Board of Directors of the Center and the Commission was chaired by Ira Magaziner, a prominent Clinton adviser. In any case, the report calls for a thorough revamping of American schools to produce "world class" workers who can work in "high performance workplaces" and allow the United States to compete with the best of Europe and Asia. Its argument goes like this - if American workers don't have high skills, then they'll only be able to get low wages. The report's recommendations include the development of new exams and new certificates (in part, to replace high school diplomas).

But, the report scarcely mentions the most enduring reality of American schools. Even though schooling is, other than



jury duty, the most decentralized and locally controlled part of the American government structure, schools from one end of this country to another manage to produce a remarkable uniformity in outcomes. Black students always do worse than white students. That will not change even if the schools are restructured. (And it will not change even if we have multi-cultural education in the schools. But that is an argument for another day.) I predict that, if the reforms envisioned in America's Choice" are implemented, we will have what we had until recently - relatively high wages for white men and low or no wages for the rest.

A last note on the report - another member of the Commission was Edward J. Carlough. His biography, included in the report, is as follows:

Edward J. Carlough is General President of the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, AFL-CIO. He was elected President of the union in 1970 and has been reelected without opposition at each successive convention. He has helped create the National Training Fund for apprentices and journeymen, a Stabilization Agreement to help unemployed workers and the National Energy Management institute. Prior to becoming President, he served 13 years as the Sheet Metal Union Research Director and Organizing Director. Mr. Carlough became a Sheet Metal Workers' apprentice in New York City in 1949. Currently, he serves as Vice President of the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department and a member of the General Board of the AFL-CIO.

Unfortunately, the biography left out the information that sheet metal workers in New York City, where Mr. Carlough began his career, are represented by Local 28 - the union with perhaps the single worst record of any of excluding blacks from its membership. (Hill) I'm sure his experience with the usefulness of apprenticeship as a way of exclusion was quite helpful to the Commission.

## Conclusion

Many of those who are recommending the linking together of education and work preparation are determined to alter the attitudes and values of young people and to make them correspond to the demands of the workplace as they would have that workplace function. Those who work in education programs should be very cautious about their participation in such efforts.

Enhanced educational accomplishment might make a contribution to the examination of the realities facing young and older workers. And it might make an important contribution to the rebirth of progressive popular movements. But it might not. In the same essay cited above, Piven and Cloward caution us against a too facile assumption that literacy, for example, will yield political wisdom for ordinary folks:

... mass literacy inhibits the capacity of people to develop relatively autonomous interpretations of their particular social reality, for ordinary people do not produce their truths in literate form. (Piven & Cloward)

James Gee has argued that literacy is the mastery of what he calls "a secondary discourse." For him, discourse systems are the ways in which people define themselves in terms of the many different communities they participate in and therefore are very much the stuff of the identities that people imagine they might have. Recall, if you will, my earlier point about young people developing a 'realistic' sense of their possibilities. What I believe to be important is not to deny the insight embodied in that realism but rather to work against its fatalistic components and to nourish in young and not-so-young people the idiosyncratic and disjointed elements of their ideas and actions that work at cross purposes with a resignation to that fatalism and to suggest that those counter impulses can be crystallized to produce new discourses and new social identities.

For the most part, mass literacy has been accomplished through participation in schools or school-like structures. In any case, it is not likely that the contributions of education programs will be decisive to the emergence of a movement for social change. What is needed is not an approach to education that further fossilizes old identities but rather one which nourishes the cultivation of new ones - with new notions of possibility and responsibility.

I believe that our most enduring problems will be most satisfactorily addressed by the emergence and growth of a resurgent movement. No one can will that movement into being. But we might assist in its development by establishing situations, within and without formal school settings, for individuals to expand their own political capacities. Those capacities include the ability to understand the relationship between personal action and social consequence, the ability to understand other points of view, the ability to articulate one's own ideas to various audiences as well as the ability to work with others to achieve agreed upon goals.

At the same time, this approach has its risks. There are ways in which many young people might imagine themselves acting that will dismay and frighten their elders. I see no way around that issue. There are choices to be made - either we continue with things as they are and bear the consequences or we attempt to create a different future - a course that will undoubtedly be more dangerous for those who step forward.

To return to an earlier theme, I believe that many young people are not especially open to acquiring very much of anything that school-type situations have to offer. In other words, there's a down side to the kind of embryonic resistance that I alluded to. Resistance and accommodation co-exist in the minds and hearts of many young people and cynical resignation is often the resolution. The ambivalence has to be addressed directly.



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# Civil War Reenactments and Other Myths

Phil Rubio

"Yet one monument in North Carolina achieves the impossible by recording of Confederate soldiers: 'They died fighting for liberty!'" - W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, p. 716.

## Birth of a White Nation

*We begin our story with a visit to the annual reenactment last April at Bennett Place farmhouse in Durham, North Carolina, site of the April 26, 1865 surrender of Confederate General Johnston to Union General Sherman, the largest of the Civil War. (Chapel Hill and Raleigh residents just follow the signs from 15-501: the "Jefferson Davis Highway"). My wife and her parents and I were waved to our parking place by Bo Thorpe's N.C. State Militia (Bo was fired a month later as commander for racist remarks at an all-white dance where he was the emcee. And a few years ago one of the western regiments was infiltrated by white supremacists.)*

*The reenactment is performed by the "18th and 27th NC Regiments." These are volunteers who like to take their families, put on period dress, and bring back a vanquished nation several times a year at different battle sites. They had all clearly studied the subject and enjoy bringing it to life. Many trace their family lines back to Confederate soldiers.*

*At the "Confederate Ladies' Fashion Show" across the field from the Bennett Place, the "Ladies Auxiliary" is demonstrating the layering of slaveowner undergarments. Some of the*

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women become touchy when asked who was considered a "lady," and who wore those clothes. This was obviously not considered a polite question to ask about these high-spirited belles who showed us how they hid silverware from the thieving Yankees in the folds of their skirts.

Guarding the farmhouse are the stereotype rude Yankees and polite Rebels. We're asked as we're greeted by "Mr. and Mrs. Bennett" themselves to keep our questions to the 1865 time period. "Mr. Bennett" is bearded and heavyset. "Mrs. Bennett" is cheerful, and is not wearing a hoop skirt. "Mr. Bennett" was cheerful, too, until someone asked him if he owned slaves. He didn't like that. With an exasperated sigh he answers, "No, most of us don't. Can't afford 'em. Sometimes we might borrow one. Can't get any work out of 'em anyway." Some people shift around nervously. My mother-in-law wants to go inside.

I look around in disbelief. Had he really said that? Was that the character or the man speaking? Or both? What made him say that? No black visitors were in our group, or in the other groups, or for that matter in the reenactment. And "Mr. Bennett" didn't even have to lower his voice, the way a lot of whites do today when talking about blacks or the Civil War. I realized that this was a history lesson in itself, more so than all that "Gone With The Wind" stuff going on that day.

Meanwhile, however, probably just up the road in Guilford County on a sunny day in April, 1865, stands another yeoman farmer. But that one deserted the Confederate Army after six months of combat. His wife wrote to say the farm was falling apart without him, so he went home. Today he would be covering over the hole in the ground where he hid (as many did) whenever the Home Guard came looking. Why should he be killed so some rich planter could keep slaves? He wasn't going to be like John Bennett who'd lost two sons and a son-in-law in the war.

He'd heard that in nearby Greensboro there was an ugly mood among the citizens that day, where Jefferson Davis awaits the outcome of negotiations at the Bennett Place.

*There's even talk of running him out of town, and he's tempted to join them, but he's got too much to do. Nor would we hear any narratives of former slaves about how many fled the plantations as soon as they heard the Union armies were nearby. These are not dramas we would see reenacted today. . .*

In his book *Civil War Soldiers* Reid Mitchell writes, "As the Civil War became the defining Southern memory, Southern whites developed a myth of Confederate unity and nobility of purpose that transcended the reality of their experience. In the sanctioned memory of the war, the Confederate soldier achieved an odd kind of victory. Defeat itself became glorious."<sup>1</sup>

I thought about these words again as I recently listened to a guide at the Fort Macon historical site at Atlantic Beach, N.C. talk about how "bravely" the Confederates had fought in losing the fort to Union forces in 1862 (Nothing said about the near-mutiny over food during the siege.)

I also thought about the annual reunion of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) taking place that same weekend in August in Wilmington, where they honored Linda McCall for her efforts at establishing a Southern History Month. The Florence, S.C. resident has already talked Gov. Martin as well as half a dozen other southern governors into proclaiming May Southern History Month. (We already have Confederate Memorial Day in May and Confederate Flag Day in March.) Why not, she says, there's already a Black History Month - "we" should be able to fly the flag and sing "Dixie."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, (New York: Viking, 1988), p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Raleigh News and Observer*, May 28, 1992. A funny thing happened to Confederate Memorial Day (May 10th) this year: Governor Martin decided to postpone its observance for a week "because of the

Finally, I thought of the spectacle of the Klan marching around the state capital in June praising state leaders for having allowed the Confederate flag to be flown, while the SCV lieutenant colonel called them "disgusting...(t)hey ruin everything we stand for."<sup>3</sup>

That so many Southern whites still cling to the old myths ("the Civil War was fought for states rights, not slavery") is not news, just as northern school children still learn that Lincoln went to war to "free the slaves." What *may* come as news to many was the extent of the resistance to the Confederacy here in North Carolina.

**"And it's 1,2,3 - what are we fightin' for?"**

In the South in 1861, 300,000 whites owned slaves. Five million whites were either "yeoman farmers" or had jobs that directly depended on slavery. Nearly a quarter of whites in North Carolina owned slaves, mostly in the coastal plain where the urge to secede was strongest. In the piedmont it was 10-20%. Much is made of the fact that only 6% of the state's population were large plantation owners. But the fact that half the slaveowners owned five or fewer slaves also means that more whites had a stake in that system. In addition, *all* whites were expected to act as a "police force."

With the outbreak of war, whites in North Carolina volunteered in great numbers, not for some abstract "states rights", but from the fear of having to compete with freed black labor.

Letters from Confederate soldiers echo North Carolina newspapers of the time defending their "superior civilization"

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Los Angeles riots," his office told me.

<sup>3</sup> N&O, June 15, 1992.



against the "vile... negro-worshipping... Union."<sup>4</sup> Planters and yeoman farmers both shared a deep fear of slave insurrections. Confederate Vice-President Stephens spoke for the new nation when he said in 1861, "African slavery as it exists among us(is)the proper status of the Negro... *This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution*" (italics original).<sup>5</sup>

The Confederacy was a slaveowners' coup, not the popular revolution of modern legend: the war they began was for conquest of territory, and many southerners knew it. A placard at the Bennett Place reads, "The (*pre-war*) South was experiencing a growing awareness of a separate identity." There were other opinions. "'The South,'" wrote Karl Marx in 1861, "is neither a territory completely detached from the North geographically nor a moral unity. It is not a country at all, but a battle slogan."<sup>6</sup> When war came, thousands of Tar Heels concurred and "crossed the mountains and donned blue uniforms."<sup>7</sup> In addition, nine segregated regiments (four white, five "African descent" - roughly 1,000 men in each one) were organized down here.<sup>8</sup>

Marx was (among other things) London correspondent for

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1939), p. 238.

<sup>5</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (Cleveland: World, 1935), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *The Civil War in the United States*, edited by Saul Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> William Trotter, *The Civil War in North Carolina, Volume II, Bushwhackers! The Mountains* (Greensboro, N.C.: Signal Research, 1988), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Manarin, *A Guide to Military Organizations and Installations in North Carolina, Section III* (Raleigh, 1961), pp. 1-3.

the *New York Daily Tribune*, and followed the political and military events of the war carefully. He wrote to Frederick Engels in July of 1861 of accounts he'd read in southern papers of "usurpation of power" by the secessionists (he called the Confederacy a "military dictatorship" and an "oligarchy.") In North Carolina the popular vote was narrowly *against* secession. And the 362,000 (out of 4 million in the South) disenfranchised southern blacks apparently don't count to the historians who say "people" in the state closed ranks behind the Confederacy when Lincoln called for troops.

The draft, with its exemptions for large slaveowners (the "twenty negro rule"), along with desperate conditions back home, Union victories, and the sentiment that this was a "rich man's war and poor man's fight" caused widespread desertions. While General Robert E. Lee may have coined the term "Tar Heel" in praise of North Carolina troops (meaning "they don't run under fire"), he was concerned enough with Tar Heel desertions in 1863 to threaten to *reduce* the number of North Carolina troops. Draft evasion was common. One swarthy young white man claimed exemption for being "part-Negro," while others dressed as women, cut off fingers, etc...<sup>9</sup>

### **"We're #1!"**

The Bennett Place exhibit and most historians agree that this state gave more troops, battle dead, and resources to the Confederacy than any other, despite being the last to secede. The reenactment did show Johnston joking to Sherman about having to borrow some of his soldiers to surrender, having lost so many to desertion. But hardly anyone mentions that our state also had more *deserters* (23,000 out of a total 100,000), than any other southern state.

Most were from the mountain counties, especially Madison, which was occupied off and on from the beginning of the

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<sup>9</sup> John Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1963), p. 185.

war by deserters (who also came from every other southern state), "bushwhackers," and "tories" (Unionists). Henderson and Cherokee counties fell under the military occupation of deserters (estimated to be 1200 in the mountains in 1863), and organized by the Order of the Heroes of America. The Home Guard would often set up a truce, or even fraternize at night with the very deserters they were supposed to be chasing by day! In Wilkes County up to 500 deserters had set up a regular paramilitary force, holding drill in the open, while in Salisbury, a mob of angry women armed with axes looted flour from the warehouse of a speculator.<sup>10</sup>

Troops had to be sent to Chatham County in March, 1862 to arrest deserters. In the piedmont (an anti-secession and Quaker, but after the war a KKK, stronghold), deserters returned to Guilford, Davidson, Forsyth, Randolph, and Moore counties, many living in caves, some even with their former slaves.<sup>11</sup> It was also a family affair, with children standing picket, and wives bringing food to the hiding places. Women (not "ladies") also wrote to soldier-husbands urging them to desert and come home. Deserters found sympathy almost everywhere, and Lee unsuccessfully sent regiments to deal with them.

In *The Civil War in North Carolina*, historian John G. Barrett tells of the "Buffaloes" (the First and Second N.C. [Union] Volunteers), so called because their homemade blue uniforms made them appear huge. In August, 1862, they

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<sup>10</sup> Trotter, *op cit*, vol. II, p.139.

<sup>11</sup> See Barrett, *op cit*, p. 193 for a description of the "cave-dwellers," including this passage, "The Negro's native instinct for woodcraft was often a great help to the master through cunning suggestions, while his innocent responses to the guard usually threw the latter off the right scent. He even helped to keep his master well-provisioned." While this 1928 account that Barrett quotes sounds like the typical "docile slave" myth, consider this: here is a small farmer suddenly made a fugitive in a nation established for whites, now part of the same conspiracy as his former slave, who can leave any time.



took over the Wingfield estate near Edenton, which became "the rendezvous of fugitive negroes, lawless white men, traitors and deserters from the Confederate army." Under the command of Confederate deserter Jack Fairless they "pillaged, plundered, burned, and decoyed off slaves in their forays into Chowan and the neighboring counties...". Attacked by the Confederates in April, the "Buffaloes" escaped onto Union gunboats, leaving a note: "A leetle too late". Meanwhile, large groups of armed blacks were seizing parts of nearby Elizabeth City: a good example here of North Carolinians "closing ranks."<sup>12</sup>

Generals Burnside and Sherman during their campaigns reported fugitive slaves streaming by the thousands to their camps. Two thousand slaves left North Carolina alone on *rumors* of war in 1861. In December, 1863, Brigadier General Edward Wild, a Massachusetts abolitionist (as were his hand-picked officers), used two "Colored Regiments" in taking thousands of North Carolina slaves to freedom. (It was the first major raid solely by black troops since their enlistment was authorized by Congress. This raid was thought up and authorized by Wild's commanding officer, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, of whom it was said by many of his white troops that he had "Nigger on the brain," a timeless white aphorism denoting a European-American concerned with the human rights of African-Americans.)<sup>13</sup>

Overall, the 500,000 blacks who served as Union soldiers, spies, servants, and laborers (not to mention the hundreds of thousands who ran away) were not merely instrumental, but decisive in winning the war.<sup>14</sup> Resistance to the Confederacy

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 174-177.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 178-179. Also Ira Berlin, ed. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Du Bois, *op cit.*, p. 80.

by blacks and whites in North Carolina followed separate tracks by and large, but combined it helped cripple its war effort.

## The Resistance

The white opposition in North Carolina that helped defeat the Confederacy was more "pro-American" or anti-aristocracy than anti-slavery. But in some cases the struggle had a transforming effect on whites. There are stories of individual whites executed for helping runaway slaves. The Quakers in North Carolina officially disavowed helping runaways. But in practice many legally freed slaves, or worked in abolition societies or the Underground Railroad.<sup>15</sup> The abolitionist Daniel Worth returned to the state in the 1850s to chastise the other Quakers for their "passive do-nothing approach" to slavery.<sup>16</sup> Most Quakers left the state before the war.

Politicians like William W. Holden of Wake County were typical in their allegiance to the Union as a way of preserving slavery. He became an ally of the underground "peace group" Order of the Heroes of America during the war. As Reconstruction governor he supported the fight for equality. Conservative whites called his government, which included African-Americans and northern immigrant "carpetbaggers," "Holden's Miscegenationists" (a made-up word for "race-mixing"). He was later impeached.

Actually, the Heroes of America was not exactly a "peace group" in the pacifist sense. Formed in the piedmont counties, they carried out sabotage, helped deserters use the Underground Railroad, wrote letters encouraging desertion and

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen B. Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p. 234

<sup>16</sup> Seth Hinshaw, *The Carolina Quaker Experience* (N.C. Friends Historical Society, 1984), p. 136.

sometimes persuaded whole companies of Confederates to desert, and even plotted a joint action with Federal armies on the coast that was to be coordinated with an armed uprising in Raleigh. Their internal "cell" structure was similar to any 20th century guerilla army.

"The social makeup of the organization is also a matter of conjecture," writes William Trotter, "although its most visible members belonged to the upper middle class - doctors, merchants, clergymen, and so forth. It seems likely, though, that most Heroes were working-class whites. This can be attributed to the long-simmering resentments held by the blue-collar workers of the time against the landed gentry who ran the state's political machinery."<sup>17</sup>

I assume that in the category "working class" he includes the huge middle-class of yeoman farmers, because the piedmont working class was small and mostly black. The "poor whites" who worked in the textile mills or as farm laborers (as well as maintaining a bare-survival existence hunting and fishing), were on the periphery of white society, economically and socially. Many of the "yeomen," on the other hand, were related to the rich planters by kinship or marriage, and aspired to enter that class. For them to conspire together against their new "white nation," if true, would have been phenomenal. Of course, the failure by whites to make an ideological break with the "white nation" that *did* win the war had predictable results during Reconstruction.

### Poor Whites, Yeoman Farmers and The Class Struggle

After studying the eastern North Carolina plantation of her slave ancestors called Somerset, where she held her famous 1986 reunion, Dorothy Spruill Redford writes, "Early on (*the 1830's*) there was a strange bond between the slaves

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<sup>17</sup> William Trotter, *The Civil War in North Carolina: Silk Flags and Cold Steel, Volume I, The Piedmont* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1988), p. 182



and the poor whites. Both were, in their own way, under the yoke of the rich white man. By the time of the Civil War, poor whites around Somerset were urging the blacks to break away from Collins (*the slaveowner*) long before the first Union troops set foot on the plantation. It was an odd alliance that broke apart once the slaves were free and competing directly with the poor whites for what little was left after the war."<sup>18</sup>

She also describes a scene in October, 1862: "At the news that Yankees were in the Albemarle, the Pettigrew slaves "stampeded," and William Pettigrew had to call in troops to surround his slave houses. He, too, marched almost all his slaves to Chatham County, south of Hillsborough. The ones that remained became "indolent and out of control." Local "Buffaloes" - renegade troops under no one's command - plundered both estates. Local whites joined in, taking particular pleasure in ransacking the Collins mansion. One pillager went to far as to steal Collins' entire library - from books to furniture - and reconstruct it in his own living room."<sup>19</sup>

Yeoman farmers, as mentioned earlier, were the great middle-class. The use of the word "yeoman" here is revealing. They were the free small landowners in feudal England. Just as the planters had aristocratic pretensions in an early capitalist society, the small farmers as well were to share in this transplanted idyllic feudal society. Assuming, of course, that you could "get any work out of" those serfs. But from 1863 on, yeomen in large numbers in the piedmont and mountains were bailing out of the Confederacy.

How could all these white farmers feel so strongly both ways? Barbara Jeanne Fields writes this about the yeoman farmer: "Strong belief in the value of social independence led

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Spruill Redford, *Somerset Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p. 120.

the non-slaveholders to share with planters a contempt for both the hiring labourers of the North and the chattel slaves of the South; it also bred in them an egalitarian instinct that never gracefully accepted any white man's aristocratic right to rule other white men - a right the planters never doubted with regard to the lower classes of whatever colour. The racial ideology of the yeomanry therefore could not possibly replicate that of the planters. Instead, it emerged as a byproduct of the practical, day-to-day business of the yeomen's lives."<sup>20</sup>

So when Jeff Davis instituted conscription, the "tithe tax," and rule by decree, "states rights" became "read my lips." From that point on, yeomen and poor whites alike regarded "the deal" as null and void, and withdrew from the fight in droves. From Madison County, P. Black wrote, "Our pore class of men are all gonnn to the war to fighte to save our countrey and the rich man Negroes... are all at home."<sup>21</sup>

In the western mountains, the struggle was similar to that happening in eastern Tennessee, which was in Union hands for most of the war. Most of these white settlers had not been indentured to plantation owners, and had a self-sufficient economic tradition. While most of the working class consisted of African slaves, working-class whites were appearing in the mountains in the 1830's as mines, mills, and factories opened up, with slaves, freedmen, and whites often working in the same shop.

"In the western counties, the prospects were excellent for a diversified and expanding economic base, one that more closely resembled the New England economy than the economies of Georgia or South Carolina. The few scattered pockets of industrialization which existed in the mountains in 1860 looked to the technologically advanced North for their

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<sup>20</sup> Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May-June, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Barrett, *op cit*, p. 188.

inspiration, not to the labor-intensive systems of the Deep South. If the movement toward secession was fueled by the economic interests of the planter class, the Unionism of the mountain counties was an instinctive reaction... to protect that nascent, very different, economy..."<sup>22</sup>

As Reid Mitchell points out, "the Mason-Dixon Line was no Berlin Wall."<sup>23</sup> Many Northerners who lived down South fought for the Confederacy, while in the North Carolina mountains, you had real "civil" war, with family against family, poor against rich. "Ironically, at the same time that Northern soldiers expressed the sentiments that doomed Reconstruction, the shock of defeat left Southern soldiers more willing to accept changes in the South than they would ever be again. They had been defeated and they knew it; they believed that the North had the power and the will to create a revolution in Southern society... 'Who is to blame for all this waste of life' (wrote Captain Samuel T. Foster), 'And what does it amount to?... What were we fighting for, the principles of slavery?'"<sup>24</sup>

Slavery was destroyed by a black general strike, and the war for slavery impoverished many white Tar Heel farmers. With a poor white rebellion in the mountains, the piedmont, and the coast, in some cases threatening to make common cause with free people of color, this "cornerstone" had to be re-established quickly. Whites had followed blacks across Union lines and could not be allowed to go any further. Those who had blamed blacks as well as planters for the war were the first recruits in what Reid Mitchell called the guerilla war for white supremacy.

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<sup>22</sup> William Trotter, *op cit*, vol. II, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *op cit*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 204.



## Birth of a White Nation II

We pick up our story inside the Bennett farmhouse during the April Civil War reenactment, where the officers are negotiating the surrender terms. We're urged to keep our questions to the 1865 period. The "rude Yankee" guards are edgy as we go in - one wants to know what our cameras are for. A large man with a video camera demands to know why Sherman had to burn Atlanta. (My wife thought he was kidding, but he sounded serious to me.) "Sherman," pretending to be angry, also replies with a southern accent, "Get this guy out of here!" Everybody's having a good time playing Civil War. "When I dress up," said our guide in a gray uniform, "I really feel like I'm back there."

Confederate General Johnston complains about the new, stiffer terms Sherman has had to offer to replace the original overly-generous ones he previously offered. "I'm sorry," says Sherman," but it's not up to me - it's those politicians in Washington!" We know who he's talking about. The "bad guys" - Radical Republicans, known by the Democrats back in their race-baiting days as "Black Republicans." They obviously didn't realize this war was just a dispute between "white gentlemen." We hear Confederate Major General Breckinridge issue his famous complaint about Sherman not offering these southern gentlemen his whiskey. (The real Sherman said later, "Those fellows hustled me so, I was sorry for the drink I did give them."<sup>25</sup>)

As we come out of the farmhouse, I look across the field and see that another "Confederate Ladies Fashion Show" is about to begin. How would these latter-day southern belles react to studies (like Professor J.L. Dillard's study of Black English) that indicate the southern dialect came from the African slaves? Charles Dickens noticed while touring the U.S. that it was slaveowners' wives whose speech was most

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<sup>25</sup> Burke Davis, *Sherman's March* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 264.

*influenced, being at home more and having more contact with them.*<sup>26</sup>

Since we moved down South four years ago, friends and relatives from up North have asked us (without realizing the irony of their question), "are they still fighting the Civil War down there?" But the war isn't just a continuation of resentment felt towards Yankees and African-Americans by bigoted whites, but a continuation of the war that split communities of whites over a century ago. Today you can still see reenacted, in the North and the South, the fight for the very souls of "white folks" by blacks and other whites.

*I went back to the Bennett Place in August for a reenactment of a Confederate camp. The "ladies" were still having their fashion show. (In reality they would by this time most likely be at home doing their own housework: it is doubtful they could "get any work out of" the blacks who stayed on the plantation.) Middle-aged men and teen-aged boys were demonstrating the formations and firing lines that caused an incredible slaughter on both sides. Others were engaged in earnest discussions with "civilians" about common "myths" of camp life and warfare. Yet no one questioned the biggest myth of all: that of the noble, united, slightly misguided "lost cause." No doubt many of those who "fought" today are war veterans, either in Vietnam or Korea, while others who missed combat are finally getting their chance. This is the lesson to be learned: if anybody rich, white, and powerful calls on you to follow orders and bear arms, don't ask questions. Just do it.*

*As I walked towards my car, I noticed a bumper sticker on one of the reenactor's trucks in the parking lot. With a Confederate flag on one side, it said, "Heritage, not Hatred.... Defend it!" No doubt about it - this was no ethnic food*

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<sup>26</sup> Robert McCrum, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English* (New York: Penguin, 1986), pp. 214-216.

*fair. Nor was this some weird "cult" - this is what you would call "white culture" - honoring those who fought to enslave another people, but pretending it was for something else, like "patriotism." The "heritage" these families were reenacting was the same old fairytale white nation of lords and ladies and happy yeomen that really wasn't that cruel to blacks. And ignoring the guilt, the second thoughts, and the desertion of many of their ancestors.*

*Where are the monuments to those who died fighting the Confederacy? The bushwhackers, tories, "Buffaloes" and cave-dwellers? The Underground Railroad? Why is there only a marker in nearby Hillsborough that just reads "Slave's Graveyard," that's not even on the walking tour? Why is there no monument to the "Colored Regiments" that liberated slaves in Camden County, or guarded Fort Macon, N.C. from 1865 until 1877? The heritage that we need to see reenacted is that of the abolitionists, runaway slaves, deserters, and Union volunteers. Those brave people gave us a heritage worth defending.*



# The White Question

David Roediger

Two decades ago, Ralph Ellison asked a big question which refuses to go away:

"What, by the way, is one to make of a white youngster who, with a transistor radio, screaming a Stevie Wonder tune, glued to his ear, shouts racial epithets at black youngsters trying to swim at a public beach . . .?"

We could update the images, but the basic riddle remains the same: What are we to make of the young white kid with a Public Enemy baseball cap and a Confederate flag belt buckle? What are we to make (that is, how are we going to remake) a country which pours out its heart to Magic Johnson at the very moment when 55% of the white voters in Louisiana pick a Klansman as their choice for governor? Why is it that white racism always seems to be "getting better" and "getting worse" at the same time?

I hope that my recent *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* is read with such huge questions in mind. Focusing on the formative years before 1877, it cannot pretend to offer any final answers, but it does perhaps suggest some ways to account for the contradictory consciousness which keeps scarring the United States. *Wages* argues that from the early 1800s, when large numbers of Northerners began to define themselves as "white workers," to be white was both an urgent necessity and a lifeless burden. Adopting the identity of a "white worker" provided a way to gain political, and sometimes economic, status, but was also a cultural straitjacket which cut infected

*This article originally appeared in The African-Americanist at the University of Missouri - Columbia, where David Roediger is on the faculty of the History Department.*

workers off from their preindustrial past, their connections to African-American workers, and their very humanity. It is easy enough to see why a slavemaster might have wanted to think of himself as white, and thus as different from those whom he held in bondage. But what would make a worker want to be white, indeed to organize much of his or her consciousness and personality around being white? Competition with African-Americans for jobs has been the most popular answer given to this question, but in the North, where workers constantly proclaimed their whiteness, there were actually very few Black workers with whom to compete. The attractions of whiteness were typically more subtle than jobs and dollars. W.E.B. Du Bois' great observation that whiteness paid off in "public and psychological wages" takes us much closer to reality.

In the early U.S., the only modern society in which a large white working class grew up alongside a large slave population, a major attraction of whiteness was that it decisively separated "freemen" from "slaves." Since the small numbers of "free blacks" were almost never treated as citizens, the association of whiteness with freedom and of blackness with dependence and degradation, remained firm. To proclaim whiteness became a way for wage workers to claim certain privileges and to deny their own dependency on employers in a post-Revolutionary American society which highly prized independence.

The desire to "declare independence" by refusing to be called anything like a slave influenced the very way white workers named themselves. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that in the early nineteenth century Americans suddenly popularized the terms "hired man," "hired women" and "hired people" to describe farm and household workers. The new words "applied to free men or women engaged as servants (the latter word being formerly used to include slaves.)" This same unwillingness of whites to be associated with the language used to describe slaves ran through the 1807 comments of a New England maid who took offense when a British visitor innocently asked if her master was at

home. She had "no master," she insisted, adding "I am Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s help. I'd have you know man, that I am no servant; only negers are sarvants."

Skilled workers had been used to calling their employers "masters" but after the American Revolution it suddenly became intolerable to do so. Although the term "master" mainly referred to the employer's status as master of a craft, it sounded too much like "slavemaster." The early American author, James Fenimore Cooper, wrote in 1837 that the "laboring classes of whites" so hated to be connected with "negro-slaves" that they had altogether dispensed with the term "master." "So far has this prejudice gone," Cooper observed, that white workers "have resorted to the use of the word boss," borrowing from the Dutch language.

Words such as "boss" and "help" (as in "Help Wanted" ads) are still very much with us and so is the white workers' consciousness which produced them. Militant and assertive-sounding, such consciousness does justify standing up to the employer, but as a white rather than as a worker. It loudly places demands on capital and on the state at times, but often those demands can be satisfied simply by pushing people of color down rather than pulling all workers up.

The coin in which the "wages of whiteness" was paid also had an even more ominous flip-side. The early 19th century saw a tremendous disciplining of white laboring people. The old rhythm of rural and agricultural working days--governed by sunshine, season and weather and including alternating bouts of hard work and free time--gave way to timed, closely supervised labor for as many as 14 hours daily, day after day, sometimes even under artificial lighting in the night. "Traditional" rights such as long breaks to eat, drink and socialize in the middle of the day went by the boards. Work continued even if it were berry-picking season. Not immediately, but over time, white workers came to accept these losses of freedom. They did so, in large part, by imagining that the desires to mix work with pleasure, to stay in close contact with nature and even to sing and dance were Black things, unworthy of the "superior" white worker. The white worker



was, to borrow George Rawick's vivid language, like a "reformed sinner" who "creates a pornography of his former life" in the way he imagined African-American culture. "In order to insure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed fantasies," Rawick added, "He must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled." Those fantasies were by no means just sexual; they included everything from taking it easy on the job to skipping work and going fishing.

The minstrel stage was the place where white actors and audiences imagined a culture which featured joy, ties to the land and a refusal to be governed by clocks and bosses. But the actors could only create such a culture beneath blackfaced masks. One minstrel joke asked, "Why is we . . . like a slave ship on de Coast of Africa?" "Because," came the reply, "we both make money taking off [N]egroes." The pun worked in many ways. Minstrels took--that is, ripped off--music and dance from African-American culture. Their "taking off" of Black culture involved both imitating it and ridiculing it. And, finally, their act rested on being able to "take off" the blackface mask and to reveal that underneath they were as white as the audience. Both the mask and the ability to wash it off were necessary for antebellum minstrelsy to work. The blackface show was a confession that white culture was bankrupt and sterile in comparison to the real or imagined fascinations of African-American culture. But, at the same time, it was also an expression of contempt toward African-Americans themselves.

Far from being a "natural" or "timeless" response to African-Americans, the racism, and indeed the very whiteness, of white workers was the historical product of the tragedy of U.S. history. White workers' consciousness can therefore change. That is the good news. The more sobering news is that the explosive combination of hatred and fascination which created white workers' consciousness is not easily disarmed. When whites become fascinated with African-American culture and even with African-American cultural heroes, racism does not automatically disappear.

# Malcolm X beyond labels

David Kurnick

Malcolm X is an increasingly prominent figure in the American imagination. Interest groups of all types fight over his legacy. Predictably, they all too often fit this legacy into a soundbite format. The nation's vocabulary for dealing with race relations is so narrow that Malcolm X is portrayed in two ways that had little to do with him: he becomes either a rabid, racist militant, or a convert in the end to the nonviolent ideals associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. Malcolm X saw more clearly through the fabric of American beliefs than those who would label him; his complex, profoundly transgressive philosophy does not lend itself to quick summation.

The rapid changes Malcolm X underwent towards the end of his life complicate the task of understanding him. The *Autobiography*, while a valuable text for following his direction, presents certain problems, in part because it was written with the assistance of a professional writer, Alex Haley, who naturally influenced its final form. By its structure, and through Haley's Epilogue, the *Autobiography* emphasizes the changes in Malcolm's racial policies, as if they were the main substance of his developing thought. What emerges at the end is a peaceful, integration-minded Malcolm X - certainly a more palatable, less threatening figure to a largely white reading audience than the militant follower of Elijah Muhammad who dominates the middle section.

The image is false, though, as Malcolm's speeches from the period illustrate. He obviously had complete and final editorial control over the content and form of his speeches. The things he said during the last year of his life convey a picture different in focus and content from the one offered by the *Autobiography*. It is true that on January 19, 1965, two

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weeks before he died, Malcolm said, "I don't care what a person looks like or where they come from. My mind is open. . ."--and it is a crucial point that Malcolm no longer espoused racism. But an overview of the final speeches shows that this was not the focus of his thought at the time. Instead, there was an increased awareness of international possibilities, a critique of the capitalist system, along with an indictment of the "white man's" justice and government as bitter as before. Although he'd realized that whites were not inherently evil, he was as angry as ever at them in general. On January 7, he had claimed only the "John Brown school of liberals" were worth his time. On the 24th, he sent a message to the American Nazi Party stating that any attempts by the Nazis or the Klan to disrupt black voting would "be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence." That month he also told a nonviolent questioner, "I don't think 1965 will be a very nonviolent year. Your year was '64."

His opposition to nonviolence and his anger were obviously as strong as ever. What is new in these speeches, then, is not the absence of racism so much as the broader international perspective it allowed. The new racial thought is a sort of necessary corollary. It was not the point, though, not the end product of his thought. This fact was clear to Eldridge Cleaver, then a black prison inmate in a perfect position to understand Malcolm X, who always claimed to be talking to poor, powerless black people. Cleaver spoke of black racism as a burden, almost a tactical hindrance to the real objective of helping black people. Writing of Malcolm's letter to the mosque about his blonde, blue-eyed Muslim friends, Cleaver said, "there were those of us who were glad to be liberated from a doctrine of hate and racial supremacy. The onus of teaching [racism]. . . , which is the white man's burden, is pretty hard to bear." This is not to suggest that Cleaver and Malcolm X were not genuinely opposed to black racism but that they understood in addition that the Nation of Islam's racism was an obstacle



in the path to a larger goal.

The goal, according to Malcolm's last statements, seemed to have more to do with international economic change than with whether whites and blacks could all hold hands. Malcolm said in an interview of January 18, 1965 that an Algerian ambassador, who was light-skinned enough to be called "white" in America, "showed me where [black racism] was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary." In other words, categorically vilifying non-blacks needlessly makes enemies of those among them interested in liberation. To Malcolm X, it was a necessary, logical step on the way to a larger revolution. These final speeches, especially as read by an imprisoned black man, show Malcolm to be anything but an accommodationist by the end of his life.

James Baldwin has written that

Malcolm was not a racist. . . his intelligence was more complex than that; furthermore, if he had been a racist, not many in this racist country would have considered him dangerous. He would have sounded familiar and even comforting. . . What made him unfamiliar and dangerous was not his hatred for white people but his love for blacks.

Baldwin identified precisely the aspect of Malcolm's philosophy that made him such a vital figure to black Americans, and what still makes his thought so alien to modern America; mainstream society concentrated (and concentrates) on Malcolm's feelings about whites, but his feelings were not primarily about them.

Such a realization helps explain Malcolm's statements at the end of his life. Although he had a global perspective, he was still intimately concerned with the section of the world's population he knew best: America's black people. It is to this group that his final statements were aimed. It was their uplift, their dignity, and not their relationship to their

white countrymen, that he concentrated on. Marlene Nadle, in an interview she conducted with Malcolm X for the *Village Voice* in February, 1965, missed this point. She was thinking about white people when she asked him if he planned to use hate to organize. "I won't permit you to call it hate. Let's say I'm going to create an awareness. . . you have to wake people up first, then you'll get action," he responded. Nadle's query--"Wake them up to their exploitation?"--seems, to the white reader, logical--until Malcolm's answer rockets back: "No, to their humanity, to their worth, and to their heritage."

We see Malcolm resisting a "white" slant on his thought. Two months before his death he told an audience, "It's a dangerous thing, you know, to let yourself get to where every time someone's talking, you think they're talking about you. It's not so good." Such a mistake on the part of whites is understandable and predictable, considering the elaborate psychological contortions necessary for them to feel white. As Baldwin has explained, "whiteness" requires "blackness" to define itself; once black people decide they no longer care about the values of whites, whiteness is left strangely anchorless. Hence the distraught, crying woman who pleads with Malcolm X to know "What can I *do*?" "Nothing," he tells her. And until his death, that answer remained essentially the same - unless she happens to be the John Brown sort of person.

Malcolm X tells in the *Autobiography* of his amazement at, and distaste for, whites who frequented Harlem clubs, excitedly gushing over how much they appreciated Negro "soul." It is not hard to imagine these same people a few years later tearfully pleading to know where they fit into Malcolm's program. It is a strange feature of American racism that whites need black people in some way - perhaps because they hope black people have that bit of humanity they themselves gave up in becoming "white." As Baldwin wrote, "though [whites] have never learned how to live with the darker brother, they do not look forward to having to learn to live without him."

Malcolm X insisted on being understood as a leader of

and for American black people, before any other group. To whites, the suggestion that black people could look for a solution to their problems that does not involve, indeed feature, them "constitutes," as Baldwin wrote, "the most disagreeable of novelties." Faced with this suggestion, whites (and some black people who cannot escape the racial categories Malcolm X found so crippling) see Malcolm as either a hater of whites or an integrationist. He was neither. Both racism and integration accept the American system as given, and Malcolm X was an enemy of the fundamental hypocrisy he saw in the American system. There is no way to understand Malcolm X fairly and fit him into the patterns America has created.

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**Editors' afterword.** *This issue of Race Traitor goes to press before the release of Spike Lee's film on Malcolm X. The Boston Globe of November 9 features a front-page article by Patricia Smith anticipating (and attempting to shape?) the film's impact on viewers, particularly young black people. It is a handy example of the sort of thinking Kurnick addresses. After reporting black anger at the latest (near-fatal) beating by whites of a black man in South Boston, Ms. Smith reports that "many blacks . . . latch onto the words 'by any means necessary,' not taking the time to learn that Malcolm was not speaking of retaliatory violence, but of mental and spiritual preparation."*

*"Malcolm X," according to Ms. Smith, "advocated a strict black nationalism that stressed responsibility--and by the time of his death he had come to the conclusion that blacks and*



*whites could live peacefully in the same sphere--if the black man took steps to control his own fate." (Did Malcolm X ever say that blacks and whites could live peacefully together without changes on the part of whites?)*

*She quotes Malcolm's words, "I for one will join in with anyone, I don't care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth."*

*"This does not," comments Ms. Smith, "sound like the man [some young blacks] say preached about 'an eye for an eye.'" The Malcolm she hopes will emerge from the film "spoke of power through racial inclusion."*

*Ms. Smith's categories apparently do not allow for a man who would no longer let people's color determine his opinions of them but who still called upon Afro-Americans to defend themselves from their enemies, "by any means necessary."*

# Letter from Europe

Louis Kushnick

"We want to build a monument to Erich Honecker. He was a Communist idiot, but his policies preserved an island of 17 million pure-race Germans with some vestige of Aryan consciousness." German neo-nazi leader, quoted in the *New York Times*, November 2, 1992.

The spectre of crowds of cheering and jeering Germans chanting "Sieg Heil" and "Germany for the Germans" and singing "Deutschland uber alles" while physically attacking foreigners and fire-bombing their homes has sent shivers down the spines of millions of people around the world. The growing electoral appeal of neo-nazis in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy, coming at a time of economic downturn, has been seen by many as an augury of even worse to follow. The momentum of racism in Europe is shown also in the willingness of governments and opposition parties to make it legitimate through restrictive immigration and asylum policies. European race movements are developing a common culture "which defines all Third World people as immigrants and refugees, and all immigrants and refugees as terrorists and drug-runners. [The racist culture] will not be able to tell a citizen from an immigrant or an immigrant from a refugee, let alone one black from another. They all carry their passports on their faces." (Sivanandan, "Editorial,"

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*Race and Class*, Vol 32, No. 3, January-March 1991, Special Issue: "Europe: Variations on a Theme of Racism," p. v)

Working-class militancy after World War II created the political environment for welfare capitalism--the growth of the Social Wage, expanding the role of the state in providing a safety net. The failure of the working-class institutions and of social democratic parties to build upon that militancy, and the increasing economism of the trade union movement, led to a weakening of the working class's ability to defend these reforms. Imperialism and unequal development provided capital with populations available for recruitment to the metropole as cheap labour. These people--whether Afro-Caribbeans or Asians from the Indian subcontinent coming to Britain, or people from the Mahgreb or Senegal coming to France, or Surinamese or Indonesians coming to the Netherlands, or Turks or southern Italians or Yugoslavs coming as "guest workers" to Germany--were brought to do the shit work of the society, in the hospitals, hotels, the kitchens, the foundries, on the buses, the building sites and outside the trade unions.

They were cheap not because of any inherent characteristics they possessed, but because of the racial-national hierarchies into which they were slotted. The dominant racist popular culture was reinforced by the political parties and trade unions which adopted an exclusive rather than an inclusive definition of *us*. This definition was reflected in a variety of ways, including the failure of the post-World War II Labour Government to incorporate Afro-Caribbeans and Asians into the polity and society. This failure, and the actions of expedient politicians such as the former Minister of Housing, Bob Mellish, who blamed the Commonwealth immigrants for housing shortages at the 1965 Labour Party Conference, created the framework within which significant numbers of working-class whites succumbed to racial appeals. Postwar French governments, with Socialist and Communist participation, fought racist colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, to maintain France's august position in the world and to validate its *mission civilisatrice*. These wars did much



to reinforce the presumption of a link between "race" and nationality. Other ex-colonial countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands have had similar histories which are available for nationalist-racist political culture and identity.

Germany's defeat in World War II was not followed by root-and-branch denazification--because of the exigencies of anti-Communism. The determination to leave affairs of state in "safe" hands was accompanied by a reluctance to confront the ideological bases of nazism, including its definition of Germanness. The consequences of this failure is still playing out in Germany--for example, German-born children of Turkish settlers are not German citizens, but so-called ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union who have never lived in Germany and do not speak German are allowed entry and automatic citizenship on the basis of blood.

The concentration of migrants-settlers (migrant workers who resisted attempts to return them to their homelands and who brought their families to live with them) in the worst jobs with the worst working conditions, lowest pay and status reinforced the common-sense view that shit people do shit jobs which host country workers no longer had to do. Workers of the host country were thus raised in status--which validated the popular culture of race-nation hierarchy. Ideology was thus reinforced by material stratification. The migrants, particularly the "guest workers," occupied the worst and most overcrowded housing, paid social security-national insurance taxes and did not receive commensurate benefits; in effect subsidising the social wage of the indigenous workers. Lacking political rights because they were not citizens, their social wage was lower than the social wage of indigenous workers. So attractive were such immigrant workers, that Britain moved, in the words of Sivanandan, from status to contract in a series of immigration laws between 1962 and 1971. At the beginning of that period citizens from the "New Commonwealth," that is, the non-white Commonwealth countries, had citizenship rights in Britain under the Nationality Act of 1948. At the end of the period such people no longer had rights of entry and could only come under the

same conditions as aliens. An example of the types of division caused by such patterns of racial labour market segmentation was the situation in Germany in the 1970s where German workers joined company security personnel and police in "liberating their factory"--that is, they invaded the Ford factory which was being occupied by Turkish workers protesting their exclusion from trade union elective offices. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s black workers in Britain had to struggle against trade union bureaucrats and often against white fellow trade unionists to gain equality in the workplace.

The exclusion of migrants-settlers from the political process reinforced their marginalisation by the media and the state. In Britain, for example, Afro-Caribbeans, particularly Afro-Caribbean male young people, were labeled as muggers by the press and the police, which justified still more repressive measures against the Afro-Caribbean community: an Afro-Caribbean male between the ages of 16 and 24 in London is eight times more likely to be stopped and searched on the streets than a white of the same age. At the same time, Asians were portrayed as illegal immigrants, justifying still more restrictive immigration laws and procedures. One terrifying consequence of such policies, was exposed in 1979: Asian women coming into Heathrow were subjected to an internal gynocological examination in order to determine whether they were virgins. The reasoning was that no Asian man would marry a woman who was not a virgin; if she was not a virgin she was not a bona fide fiancée and therefore was an illegal immigrant.

The combination of criminalisation, bad housing, shit jobs or high levels of unemployment, differential, racist educational outcomes and a racist criminal justice system has led in Britain to a black male imprisonment rate twice that of white males and a black female rate three times that of white women. In France and Germany and other western European countries there have been similar patterns of criminalisation and stereotyping. Police relations with young beurs (French-born children of Mahgreb migrants) in France are similar to those between the police and black youth in

Britain. The channeling of young settlers into unemployment or marginal employment has become a feature of western European life. Although the ghettos that have been created are not as racially monolithic as those found in the United States, there has been a pattern of racial concentration in areas of deprivation, bad housing and lack of amenities.

Thus, racial tensions were created and maintained as part of the post-World War II "economic miracle" (which was based on the importation of cheap labour to the metropole). The crisis of the western capitalist system, hidden for a while by the death throes of the Soviet Union, has exacerbated those tensions. The racist ideology has provided a card to be played by the agents of capital at a time when the organisations which were supposedly the agents of the working people dramatically failed to address and oppose the take-backs, the dismantling of large parts of the welfare state, the lowering of the social wage and the deterioration of the life conditions and chances of the working people of western Europe. The construction of the migrant worker-settler as the outsider, *the other*, both limited their rights during the period in which their labour was required and laid the groundwork for the attacks on them in this period of deindustrialisation, deskilling and resurgent mass unemployment.

The European governments have tried (without success) to pressure "migrants," even those born in those countries, to "return." Attempts to buy them out have failed for obvious reasons: the continuing pattern of uneven development makes conditions for returnees in the sending countries worse than what they endure in the host countries; the insufficient amount of money offered; the ties which the migrants-settlers have in their adopted countries. There have also been attempts at forcible removal, such as those initiated in France in 1986 by right-wing interior minister, Charles Pasqua, who stripped immigrants facing deportation of basic rights of due process, deported 101 Malians chained together in a specially chartered aircraft, and deported 17,000 migrants in the year these measures were in force. As draconian as these measures were, they could not expel over two million people. They



were, however, sufficient to label the two million as people who did not belong, to reinforce their functioning as lightning rods for fear and hatred, to pressure them further into a defensive position, while ensuring the continued economic benefits to capital of their labour in the low-wage sectors of the economy.

When the Labour government pushed the Kenya Asian Bill through Parliament in 1968, taking away the right of entry into Britain of holders of United Kingdom and Colony passports, the legislation included a provision for white--or patial--holders of such passports to continue to enter Britain. It was thus clear that it was the race of the passport holders that determined their right to enter Britain, that is, that determined whether they were part of **us**. Even after the Labour government's Immigration White Paper of 1965 made operational the Conservative government's 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act and set a quota of 8,500 primary immigrants from the Commonwealth (with Malta having 1,000 of that quota), and banned unskilled workers without a specific job to come to, they were susceptible to Conservative politician Enoch Powell's playing of the race card in 1968. Despite the fact that only an average of 6,500 black primary immigrants entered Britain between 1965 and 1972, the Conservative government of Edward Heath passed through Parliament in 1971 the Commonwealth Immigration Act which abolished the right of black people to enter Britain as primary immigrants with citizenship rights. Edward Heath accounted for the third consecutive Conservative victory in 1987 by pointing to immigration as one of the three key issues responsible for that victory; he obviously did not mean white immigration. But since there had been no black primary immigration since his own 1971 legislation, it wasn't even black immigration that was the issue--it was the presence of black people in Britain itself. In other words, racism was one of the key issues determining the 1987 victory.

The fourth consecutive Conservative victory, on 9 April 1992, provides additional support for the argument that racism plays a central role in contemporary British and European

politics. In the year before the general election the Conservative Government and its allies in the press again raised the issue of immigration--or in their terms the spectre of Britain being flooded by bogus asylum-seekers. The Prime Minister, John Major, the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker and myriad of lesser Tories all warned of the threat of millions of economic migrants flooding into Britain and Europe and called for more and more restrictive immigration controls both on the European level and on the national level. On the European Community level, the British government, despite asserting its right to keep border controls even after the Single European Act comes into force at the end of 1992, was an active and enthusiastic participant in the Trevi (terrorism, radicalism, extremism and violence) group of Ministers in the Ad Hoc Group on Immigration and has also been cooperating on an informal level with the Schengen Accord nations which are setting the agenda for a Community-wide system of control. Neither of these structures are subject to democratic controls or accountability by the European Parliament. On the national level, the government introduced legislation, the Asylum Bill to deal with an increase in applications for asylum from 5,000 in 1989 to over 20,000 in 1990 and 44,000 in 1991--although there is no evidence to support the Home Office claim that the increase is due to "bogus" refugees. According to human rights groups the Bill would restrict even further the number of asylum-seekers who would be successful in their claim for refugee status. The government withdrew the bill just before the general election because there was no time to complete its legislative processes--but used it, as did the Tory papers, as a weapon against Labour in the election. Labour was accused of planning to allow in to the country thousands of bogus refugees. Only a Conservative victory would save Britain from being swamped with undesirables, i.e., nonwhite people.

The measures proposed paralleled the measures taken by other European countries in the previous decade. Thus, the race card, the image of bogus asylum-seekers and refugees

continued to be a central determinant of western European politics. The displacement of millions of people all over the world has been caused in significant part by increasing penetration of transnational corporations into all areas of the economies of Third World countries. This penetration has led to displacement of rural, agrarian people as land is taken out of subsistence farming and enters the ever-growing capitalist agricultural system. Since there is no room, no means of survival, for all those displaced in the countryside, many migrate to the cities--where they discover the same transnational corporations in the manufacturing sector of the economy, involving the take-over of locally owned, labour-intensive companies and their replacement by more capital-intensive means of production. Large groups of migrants wind up in the unofficial, marginal sectors of the economy. The hardship and insecurity place great pressure on them to migrate in search of work. In addition, local political elites, in cooperation with the transnational corporations' searching for cheap land and labour, turn towards political repression and the use of ethnic conflicts to divert attention from the real causes of what Sivanandan calls, "disorganic development". (See "Imperialism and Disorganic Development in the Silicon Age," in A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, London, Pluto Press, 1982, pp. 143-160 and his "New Circuits of Imperialism" in A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance*, London, Verso, 1990, pp. 169-195) The scapegoating of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Asians in East Africa, members of different clans in Somalia, Nubians in the Sudan. . . , the list is endless and the imperialist nations have played a central role in placing and keeping in power governments that will cooperate with the transnational corporations. The displacement of people, therefore, challenges the easy assumption that there is a clear difference between political and economic refugees. What is clear, however, is that these people will continue to arrive in western Europe from these areas of the Third World and from eastern Europe. The western European governments present themselves as under siege from bogus, economic refugees, or as the former British



Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe, called them, "economic tourists." They turn down asylum applications in ever greater numbers at the same time their economies are ever more dependent on the presence of large numbers of illegal immigrants who work in the lowest paid, worst jobs as super-exploitable labour. Recent research, for example, estimates that over 600,000 illegal migrants are working in Britain.

The presence of asylum-seekers, in hostels, barracks or camps, has proved to be a lightning rod for a range of frustrations and demands and rages which have other origins. The increasing numbers of refugees arriving in, and attempting to come to, western Europe during the 1980s coincided with attacks on full employment and the Social Wage. Capital in western Europe worked diligently throughout the 1970s to overthrow the post-World War II arrangements which extended welfare capitalism, on the grounds that they limited flexibility of labour and efficiency and competitiveness. The economy had to be restructured, the labour market had to be loosened--at the expense of the working class. This agenda required reintroducing large scale unemployment to discipline workers, dismantling large parts of the welfare state, destroying working class institutions, and ideologically assaulting alternatives involving collective provision and communitarian values. Taxation changes, based on supply-side or trickle-down principles, exacerbated class inequality, and cuts in benefits and programs benefiting the poor were striking. Even the Socialist government of President Mitterand, within a year of taking office in 1981, was forced by a capital strike to back down from an interventionist, expansionist program and to introduce the sort of cuts being imposed in other western capitalist countries and also to use unemployment as a weapon of economic policy. Governments have committed themselves to a regime of permanent deflation and consequently of mass unemployment. The ideological remnants of the supposed triumph of free market monetarism in countries such as Britain have added to the problem because of the fetishising of low inflation. These economic policies have political consequences: "The poor, discontented

and marginalised, who are in increasing numbers paying for this, will note the apparent failure of democracy. At best they will become alienated and cynical. But more and more of them are clearly turning to authoritarian and xenophobic ideologies." (Jan Toporowski, "Fascist Spectre Looms Over Stagnant Europe," *The Observer* [London], 27 September 1992, p. 24)

Faced with these attacks on their living standards and future opportunities, working-class Europeans looked around for support and leadership. Unfortunately, they found their trade unions and social democratic parties to be increasingly unable and/or unwilling to provide that leadership. The very economism and lack of militancy which had been part of the great accommodationist compromise which characterised the welfare capitalist system in the post-war period, and which involved accepting the higher status provided by the incorporation of immigrants as cheap labour during the same period, left these institutions unprepared for an environment of open warfare on the compromise itself. The racist part of the compromise had led to the exclusion of the most militant and most class conscious portions of the working class from these institutions and certainly from positions of leadership within them. The struggles of migrant workers-settlers against the racist unions were based on links between the work-place and the community; these struggles survived and often succeeded because of community support. Women, both migrant-settler and indigenous, also were largely excluded from the trade union movement, and even more dramatically from its leadership, and also had a more radical perspective on the relations between the community and the market economy than trade union male bureaucrats. Thus, the racism and sexism of the commonsense, everyday life of these societies and of the operations of the industrial and political institutions that were supposed to represent the working class incapacitated them when capital declared war on the welfare part of welfare capitalism--on the Social Wage.

Faced with this failure of their organisations, white working-class people had to find explanations and solutions.

Given the popular culture of racism that exists, it is not surprising that right-wing politicians and parties, whether within what is defined as the mainstream or on the fringe of the political system, have used the race card to divert attention from the capitalist agenda. If blacks, Turks, Algerians, etc are the *other*, are not part of *us*, "our" society, if "we" are being swamped by alien cultures, and if "we" at least are white, European, civilized--then it is clear that "they" are the cause of our problems. Hordes of aliens trying to take over our living standards threaten us. The growing appeal to working-class voters of racist and fascist parties in western Europe must be seen in this context. For example, in the French regional elections of March, 1992, exit polls indicated that the Front National was making strong inroads into the industrial working class, continuing the pattern, first identified six years ago, of winning more votes than either the Socialists or the Communists in the so-called "red belt" around Paris. The Ipsos Institute examined the data and concluded that the working-class vote amounted to around 28% of the FN's total 13.9% vote and that the FN was able to gain increased support from young people in the 18-25 age range, among whom unemployment stands at 28%. (*Searchlight*, No. 203, May 1992, p. 18) In 1992 elections in Berlin, the fascist Republikaner Partei (REP) gained its biggest support in those working-class districts of west Berlin said to be Social-Democratic strongholds: 14.4% in Wedding and 12.8% in Neukolln. In elections in April 1992 in Schleswig-Holstein and in Baden-Wurttemberg, the votes polled showed that 13% of the REP poll in Baden-Wurttemberg and 7.4% of the neo-nazi Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) vote in Schleswig-Holstein was won in urban areas. Their support was particularly heavy "among voters under 30 years of age and industrial workers in the bigger cities, where the fascists exploited resentment against foreigners with claims that 'they are taking jobs from Germans'." (*ibid*, p.15)

The economic and political crises facing western European societies are fundamental and interconnected. The creation and maintenance of mass unemployment and the cuts



in the Social Wage are not only producing despair and hopelessness, they are also producing the conditions suitable for authoritarianism and fascism. They enable mainstream right-wing governments to play the race card for electoral benefit and to try to divert attention from systemic problems onto other targets. But the more this stereotyping and scapegoating is used, the more the historically-rooted popular common-sense racism is validated; hence the more it is available to fascist or neo-nazi groups to use as the initial basis of appeal to the disaffected. The greater the appeal of these groups, the greater the danger and likelihood that the mainstream politicians will move further to the right to keep up with public opinion--witness the activities of the respectable right in France in using the language of Le Pen and of various attempts by the Socialist government to act tough on immigrants in order to relegitimate itself, and the increasing unwillingness of the German government under Chancellor Kohl, or of the Social-Democratic opposition, to condemn neo-nazi activities and express concern for the human rights of the asylum-seekers and contract workers being subjected to violent attacks--including murder.

The increasing inequality and the deskilling and blackening of large parts of the white working class are results of the imperatives of transnational capitalism in this epoch and, consequently, politics as usual is proving incapable of maintaining the standard of living, and the likelihood of transmitting that standard to one's children, which had been rationed on a racial basis in the past. Thus, while the conditions for large sections of Europe's black and migrant-settler communities continue to be worse than for most whites, the conditions for portions of white European society are deteriorating. The choice facing the people of western Europe is not one of white, indigenous democracy combined with racism and authoritarianism for blacks-migrants-settlers. It is an inclusive non-racist democracy providing decent life standards for all or an authoritarian European state for all.

# Correspondence

## Change our name

To the Editor:

Upon reflection, I make the following suggestion regarding the title of the projected new publication: instead of *Race Traitor: Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity*, I recommend *The New Abolitionist: Dismantle the white race*. My reasons:

1) The title *Race Traitor* suggests that it is a European-American project, exclusively; Afro-Americans and other "non-white" people cannot be "traitors to the white race."

2) As the prospectus states, "The white race is a historically constructed social formation." I favor a subtitle that more explicitly expresses that concept, and the process of, as the prospectus says, "the defection of enough of its members to make it unreliable as a determinant of behavior..." Although I know that iambs and anapests are less forceful than trochees and dactyls, I offer *Dismantle the white race* as more appropriate for the purpose.

Ted Allen  
Brooklyn, N.Y.  
11 May 1992

*Editors' reply.* Our title and motto are not meant to encompass everything that is involved in overthrowing the evil system of white supremacy. We recognize that Afro-Americans and other people of color are at present the main force in the struggle against white supremacy; as Ted Allen points out, they cannot be "traitors to the white race," and we are certainly not suggesting that they become "traitors to the black race." As we say elsewhere in this issue, our primary intended audience consists of those people commonly called "whites" who sense whiteness to be a problem for themselves and others. For these people, "race treason," in

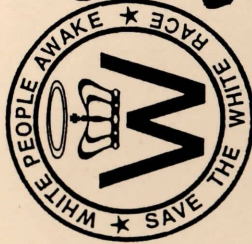
*our view, best sums up the meaning of consistent opposition to white supremacy. We hope that Afro-Americans and other people of color will see this project as consistent with their own efforts, and we hope it will stimulate discussion among all opponents of white power. We appreciate the unique contributions that persons of color, who have a wealth of experience with white authority, can make to undermining it, and we invite all interested persons to write for Race Traitor and make whatever use of it they can.*



Readers may have noted that this journal contains no information about frequency of publication, subscription rates, etc. The reason we have not provided this information is that we do not have it. Right now, we are planning a second issue for late spring, but that could change. A great part of what we do will depend on the response from readers. Send us comments, suggestions, offers of assistance, money, material for publication, ideas for circulation, or anything else you think we ought to have. We want **Race Traitor** to be the voice of a community of readers.

# Racial

Dedicated to the Survival,  
Expansion and Advancement  
of the White Race.



Published by THE CHURCH OF THE CREATOR  
P.O. Box 400, Natick, MA 01877

Issue 80

Spearhead of the White Racial Holy War

May 1992

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IT'S GREAT  
TO BE WHITE !

# Loyalty

## Christianity vs. Creativity

by Rev. Eric Hawthorne

This is a repeat of our article in R.L. No. 46 which we printed in January of 1987. Since the movie JFK has come out, there has been a tremendous renewal of interest in the government (Jewish) cover up at the time. Anyone seeing the three hour movie, as did I, can come to only one conclusion — and that is

by Ben Klassen, P.M.  
do they?" True, the assessment may have been premature and somewhat subjective, but perhaps more so than the numerous theories and conclusions circulating around in the minds of the vast majority of the American public today, and certainly it was more wild than the official conclusion put out by the Warren Commission that was quickly set upon to whitewash and confuse the whole criminal affair. After months of "investigation" the commission managed to so contrive the "evidence" that it would support the conclusion they wanted to project even before they started the expensive and long drawn out probe — namely, that it was nothing more than one lone, erratic ... "Lone Gunman Oswald" who did the job, all his his

The fact that the White Race is in serious jeopardy of extinction can hardly be debated by rational men. There is no safe haven on this Planet Earth where Whites can flee the advancing hordes of mud races for long. Our population is rapidly declining, miscegenation is on the rise, and the mud birth rate is going through the proverbial roof.

Although it takes only a rudimentary understanding of mathematics to determine that we are in serious trouble, and although every White Racial organization recognizes this fact, there is much controversy as to how we got into this predicament — and therefore — no conclusion as to how we get out. The question that I am attempting to answer is: What weakness of character softened the White Race up for enslavement to the Jewish overlords, and furthermore, what ideological influences (or other factors) contributed to this fall from grace?